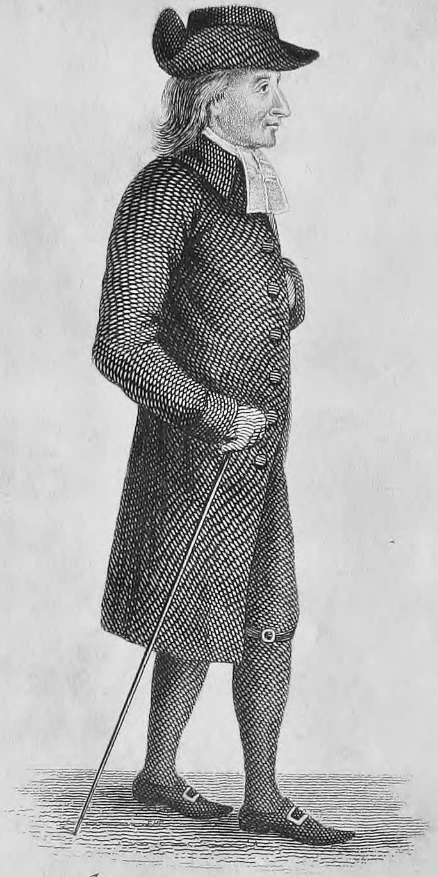
WESLEY'S DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR.



J Fletcher

Madeley

WESLEY'S DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR:

The Life, Letters, and Literary Labours

OF THE

REV. JOHN WILLIAM FLETCHER,

Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire.

BY

REV. L. TYERMAN,

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE REV. SAMUEL WESLEY, M.A., RECTOR OF EPWORTH;"
"THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.;"
"THE LIFE OF THE REV. GEORGE WHITEFIELD, B.A.;"
AND "THE OXFORD METHODISTS."

London:
HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
MDCCCLXXXII.

[*All Rights* [illegible]*d.*]

I Dedicate this Book to my Wife,

Who has shared my joys and sorrows for nearly thirty years.

L. TYERMAN.

PREFACE.

"JEAN GUILLAUME DE LA FLECHERE," wrote Robert Southey, "was a man of rare talents, and rarer virtue. No age or country has ever produced a man of more fervent piety, or more perfect charity; no Church has ever possessed a more apostolic minister. He was a man of whom Methodism may well be proud, as the most able of its defenders; and whom the Church of England may hold in remembrance, as one of the most pious and excellent of her sons."

"Fletcher was a saint," said Isaac Taylor, "as unearthly a being as could tread the earth at all."

"Fletcher," remarked Robert Hall, "is a seraph who burns with the ardour of divine love. Spurning the fetters of mortality, he almost habitually seems to have anticipated the rapture of the beatific vision."

Dr. Dixon, one of the greatest of Methodist preachers, observed, "I conceive Fletcher to be the most holy man who has been upon earth since the apostolic age."

No apology is needed for publishing the life of such a man, unless it can be shown that a life worthy of him is already in existence.

Excepting the brief and exceedingly imperfect biography by the Rev. Robert Cox, in 1822, only two Lives of Fletcher have been published since his death, ninety-seven years ago; namely, Wesley's in 1786, and Benson's in 1804.

It is true that, in 1790, the Rev. Joshua Gilpin, Vicar of Rockwardine, appended twenty-nine biographical "Notes" to different chapters of Fletcher's "Portrait of St. Paul;" but the facts they contained, in addition to those which Wesley had already given, were not many.

A year later, in 1791, the Rev. Melville Horne, Curate of Madeley, published "Posthumous Pieces of the late Rev. John William De La Flechere," a volume of 435 pages, nearly 400 of which are filled with Fletcher's Letters to his friends. This volume has been of great service to me in the present work. Many quotations are made from it, and are indicated by the footnotes, "Letters, 1791."

When Fletcher died, some of his admirers wished Mr. Ireland to be his biographer; others desired Fletcher's widow to undertake the task. Both of them judiciously declined. Wesley was then fixed upon. He asked Mr. Ireland to supply him with materials, but Mr. Ireland refused: Mrs. Fletcher, however, rendered him important help. In unpublished letters to Sarah Crosby, she writes:—

"Mr. Ireland knew and loved my dear husband as scarcely any other person did; and if he chooses to print a journal of their travels and of the great spiritual labours of which he was an eye-witness, it would not be wrong. But this is not his intention. He only wishes to gather materials for me. With a good deal of labour, I have collected some sweet fragments, on different subjects, from little pocket-books, but I have handed them to Mr. Wesley, who, however, tells me he has done nothing towards the Life, and that he has enough to occupy his time for a year to come. Indeed, he seems to be in doubt whether he will be able to write the Life at all. I hope the accounts I have given him will not be shortened; if they be, I shall repent that I did not print them myself."

This was written on June 20, 1786, and shows that ten months after Fletcher's death, Wesley had not even begun Fletcher's biography. Fourteen weeks afterwards, he made a start. An extract from his journal is worth quoting:—

"1786. September 25. Monday. We took coach" at Bristol, "in the afternoon; and on Tuesday morning reached London. I now applied myself in earnest to the writing of Mr. Fletcher's Life, having procured the best materials I could. To this I dedicated all the time I could spare till November, from five in the morning till eight at night. These are my studying hours; I cannot write longer in a day without hurting my eyes."

For little more than a month the venerable biographer, now in the eighty-fourth year of his age, devoted all the time he "could spare" in preparing the Life of one whom he pronounced the most "unblameable man, in every respect, that, within four-score years," he had "found either in Europe or America!" The biography was finished in the month of November, and in December was published with the title "A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Rev. John Fletcher. By the Rev. John Wesley. *Sequor, non passibus æquis.* London, 1786." It certainly was a "*Short Account*,"—a 12mo volume of 227 pages, which would have been much smaller if the type and the space between the lines had been different. This was the first Life of Wesley's greatest friend, and his "Designated Successor"! The veteran was far too busy to do justice to his great "helper."

Eighteen years elapsed before another and larger Life was given to the public. This was undertaken in 1801 by the Rev. Joseph Benson, at the request of Fletcher's widow, and of the Methodist Conference of that year. In 1804 it was published with the following title:—"The Life of the Rev. John W. de la Flechere, compiled from the Narratives of the Reverend Mr. Wesley; the Biographical Notes of the Reverend Mr. Gilpin; from his own Letters; and other Authentic Documents, many of which were never before published. By Joseph Benson." This is the only Life of Fletcher which, *in a separate form*, has been circulated during the last seventy-eight years.

Of course, during this long period of nearly fourscore years, many new facts and incidents concerning Fletcher have come to light; and, among these new biographical materials, special mention must be made of the Fletcher MSS. deposited in the Wesleyan Mission House, London, in 1862. Since then, the Methodist "Committee on Book Affairs" has repeatedly expressed the opinion that a new Life of Fletcher ought to be prepared, and, at least, two of the foremost men in Methodism have been requested to undertake the work. One of the two is dead, and the other seems to have as much literary labour in hand as he is able to accomplish. Under such circumstances, I have had the temerity to attempt the task.

I have carefully used *all* the *biographical matter* that I have found in the "Short Account" by Wesley; in the Letters published by Melville Horne; in Gilpin's "Notes;" in the Life by Benson; in the Fletcher MSS., just mentioned; in other MSS. belonging to myself; in MSS. kindly lent to me; and in all the Methodist and other publications relating to Fletcher with which I am acquainted.

I have no artistic talent; and if I had, I should not employ it in writing biographies. In such publications I am only desirous to see the man, not the artist's drapery. I want to know his doings, sayings, and sufferings, rather than to read philosophic discourses concerning them. My aim, therefore, from first to last, has been to let Fletcher speak for himself. His Letters are invaluable; the man who can read them without being profited is greatly to be pitied. The extracts from his sermons show how the first Methodists used to preach. The chapters respecting the Calvinian controversy may, to some readers, be somewhat dry, but they could not be omitted, because that controversy was the great event in Fletcher's life, and hastened his death. Besides, it was by his publications on this subject that he rendered service to Wesley and the Methodist movement, which neither Wesley himself nor any other of Wesley's friends could have furnished. I have refrained from discussing the truths which Fletcher's pen defended; but I have said enough to indicate what the doctrines were which created Methodism, and which alone can perpetuate its spiritual life and power.

The portrait of Fletcher is taken from an exceedingly scarce engraving, in the Methodist Museum, at Centenary Hall, London.

I think I may say, without exposing myself to the charge of arrogance or conceit, that, in this volume, the reader will find all the facts of any importance that are known concerning Fletcher, and that here, more than in any previous publication, is illustrated the intellectual and saintly character of one of the holiest men that ever lived.

L. TYERMAN.

STANHOPE HOUSE, CLAPHAM PARK, S.W.
October 7, 1882.

GENERAL CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

PAGE

Wesley requests Fletcher to be his successor—Others who might have been designated . . . . 1—3

CHAPTER I.

FROM FLETCHER'S BIRTH TO HIS COMING TO ENGLAND IN 1752.

Parentage — Birthplace — Early piety — Remarkable deliverances from danger—Education at Geneva—Removed to Lentzburg—Wishes to be a soldier . . . . 4—9

CHAPTER II.

FROM HIS COMING TO ENGLAND TO HIS ORDINATION, 1752—1757.

Arrives in London—Admitted to Mr. Burchell's school—Becomes tutor to sons of Thomas Hill, Esq.—Letter to his brother Henry —Introduced to Methodists—His conversion—A millenarian—A Catechumen—Acquaintance with Mr. Vaughan—Richard Edwards, his class-leader—Letters to Wesley—His ordination . 10—27

CHAPTER III.

FROM HIS ORDINATION TO HIS SETTLEMENT AT MADELEY, 1757—1760.

A favourite among the first Methodists—Preaches in Shropshire—Letter to Wesley—Thomas Walsh—Letter to his class-leader —Introduced to Lady Huntingdon—Preaching to French prisoners —Letter to Charles Wesley—Letter to Sarah Ryan—Christian Perfection—Fletcher and his foes—Proposal to go to the West Indies—Death of Thomas Walsh—Letter to Charles Wesley—A Convert—Conversion of Mr. Richard Hill—Temptation—Letters to Charles Wesley—Dorothy Furley—Visits Lady Huntingdon—Her ladyship's proposal—Fletcher's first published sermon—Earl Ferrars—Glorious services at Everton—Choosing a benefice—Letters to Lady Huntingdon—Commencement of ministry at Madeley . . . . 28—60

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST TWO YEARS AT MADELEY, 1760—1762.

PAGE

Madeley—Branded a Methodist—Increasing labours—Madeley Wood and Coalbrook Dale—Rev. Mr. Prothero's sermon—The publicans—Fletcher's first sermons at Madeley—Mary Matthews—Answers to an objection—"The Rock Church"—Letter to a Papist—Persecutions—Letter to Rev. Mr. Hutton—Testimony of Rev. Mr. Gilpin . . . . 61—83

CHAPTER V.

THREE QUIET SUCCESSFUL YEARS. 1762—1765.

Fanaticism among the London Methodists—Rules of Fletcher's Methodist Societies—A troublesome member—A quiet year—Reasons for and against matrimony—The furious butcher—Letters to Miss Hatton—Wesley's first visit to Madeley—Simplicity of living—Alexander Mather—Fletcher at Breedon—Fletcher's first pastoral letter—Fletcher and his relatives . . . . 84—105

CHAPTER VI.

TWO YEARS MORE. 1766—1767.

Fletcher depressed—Rejoicing on account of other men's success—Letters to Miss Hatton and Miss Ireland—Thanks for a present—An excursion to Brighton, etc.—Pastoral letter—Miss Hatton dying—Letter to Whitefield—Lady Huntingdon at Madeley—Captain Scott—Fletcher in Yorkshire—Letter to Lady Huntingdon—Rev. Cradock Glascott—Trevecca College—Fletcher appointed chaplain of the Earl of Buchan—James Glazebrook—"Manifestations of the Son of God" . . . . 106—130

CHAPTER VII.

TREVECCA COLLEGE: VISIT TO SWITZERLAND, ETC. 1768—1770.

Joseph Easterbrook—Books for Trevecca College—Letter on Conversation—Expulsion of six students at Oxford—Letter to Whitefield—Opening of Trevecca College—Letters to Mr. and Miss Ireland—Rev. John Jones—Mr. John Henderson, B.A.—First anniversary of Trevecca College—Rev. Walter Sellon—Anti-Popery sermon—Joseph Benson—Letter to Mr. Ireland—Visit to Switzerland . . . . 131—163

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE CALVINIAN CONTROVERSY. 1770—1771.

Letter to masters and students of Trevecca College—Fletcher at Trevecca College—Letter to Rev. David Simpson—Wesley's Doctrinal Minutes—Second anniversary of Trevecca College—Wesley's sermon on the death of Whitefield—Letter of Lady Glenorchy—Joseph Benson dismissed from Trevecca College—Fletcher's unpublished letter to Wesley—Fletcher resigns his

PAGE

office at Trevecca—Important unpublished manuscript—The storm brewing—Shirley's Circular Letter—Fletcher's "First Check to Antinomianism"—Shirley's "Narrative"—Fletcher's Letter to Shirley—Fletcher's Vindication of Wesley's "Minutes" 164—205

CHAPTER IX.

"SECOND CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM." 1771.

Letters in the *Gospel Magazine*—Unpublished letter to Joseph Benson—Prevalent Antinomianism—Richard Hill's pamphlet respecting a conversation with a monk . . . . . 206—217

CHAPTER X.

"THIRD CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM." 1772.

Edward Elwall—Unpublished letter to Sellon—Letter to the Dublin Methodists—Richard Hill's *Five Letters*—Fletcher's reply to them—Divine Grace given to all—Good men doing the Devil's work—Advices to Arminians . . . . 218—233

CHAPTER XI.

"FOURTH CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM." 1772.

Richard Hill's "*Review of all the Doctrines taught by the Rev. J. Wesley*"—Richard Hill's "*Six Letters*" to Fletcher—Rowland Hill's "*Friendly Remarks*"—"*Logica Genevensis*"—Wesley's "*Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review*"—Unpublished letter by John Pawson—Fletcher rebukes Rowland Hill—Absurdities of Calvinism—Free Will—Unpublished letter by Richard Hill to Walter Sellon . . . . 234—253

CHAPTER XII.

"APPEAL TO MATTER OF FACT AND COMMON SENSE." 1772.

Manuscript lost—Dedication—Doctrine of Original Sin—Colliers, bargemen, and iron-workers—England's favourite amusements—Ten inferences . . . . 254—262

CHAPTER XIII.

WESLEY'S DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR, ETC., ETC. 1773.

Wesley requests Fletcher to be his successor—Fletcher's reply—Wesley respecting Fletcher and Whitefield—Samuel Bradburn visits Fletcher—Correspondence in 1773—The penitent thief—The earthquake—Fletcher's sermon on it . . . . . 263—278

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE FINISHING STROKE," ETC. 1773.

"*The Finishing Stroke*"—"*The Farrago Double Distilled*"—Berridge's "*Christian World Unmasked*"—Letters by Berridge—Richard Hill desiring peace—Richard Hill's "*Three Letters*" to Fletcher—"*Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists*" 279—293

CHAPTER XV.

"FIFTH CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM." 1774.

PAGE

Toplady's letter to Ambrose Serle—"*Logica Genevensis continued*"—Remaining differences—Fletcher answering Berridge—Wesley on Fletcher's "*Checks*"—Lady Huntingdon wishes an interview with Fletcher—Fletcher's reply—Fletcher writing and weary . . . . 294—301

CHAPTER XVI.

FURTHER PUBLICATIONS IN 1774.

"*Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism*"—Doleful picture—Letter to Lady Huntingdon—Saving Faith—The Athanasian Creed—Letters to J. Benson and C. Wesley . . 302—311

CHAPTER XVII.

PUBLICATIONS IN THE YEAR 1775.

"*Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism continued*"—"*Scripture Scales*"—"*The Fictitious and the Genuine Creed*"—The controversy has done Fletcher good—Rev. Thomas Reader visits Fletcher—Christian perfection—Letter to J. Benson—Wesley dangerously ill—Charles Wesley writes to Fletcher—Fletcher's reply — "*Checks to Antinomianism*" — Reconciliations—Dr. Coke's Letter to Fletcher—Letter to C. Wesley 312—333

CHAPTER XVIII.

PUBLICATIONS IN THE YEAR 1776.

Toplady—Fletcher's "*Answer to the Vindication of the Decrees*"—Toplady attacks Wesley—Fletcher answers Toplady—Review of six years' work—Rev. Caleb Evans' letter on Wesley's "*Calm Address*"—Fletcher's "*Vindication of the Calm Address*"—Mr. Evans' "*Reply*" to Fletcher's "*Vindication*"—Fletcher publishes "*American Patriotism*"—A Public Fast—"*The Bible and the Sword*"—The *Monthly Review* on Fletcher—Government desires to reward Fletcher . . . . . 334—353

CHAPTER XIX.

CORRESPONDENCE IN 1776.

Fletcher's labours and abstinence—Again objects to become Wesley's successor—An excursion with Wesley—Fletcher discouraged—Unpublished letter by J. Benson—Another work for the press—"*Driving* Methodism and *Still* Mysticism—Fletcher dangerously ill—C. Wesley's hymn—Michael Onions—Letters—Fletcher apparently dying—An impromptu hymn—Wesley escorts Fletcher to London—Another excursion with Wesley—Second visit to Berridge—Fletcher and Venn at St. Neots—Charles

PAGE

Greenwood—Fletcher resides with him—Letter "to the parishioners of Madeley" . . . . 354—375

CHAPTER XX.

PUBLICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE IN 1777.

"*The Doctrines of Grace and Justice equally Essential to the Pure Gospel*"—Fletcher a millenarian—"*Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism*"—"*The Plan of Reconciliation*"—Another letter to his parishioners—Letter to W. Wase—Letters to Rev. V. Perronet and his daughter—Fletcher visited by his friends—Fletcher's letter to his bishop—Charles Perronet dies—Fletcher's sojourn at Stoke Newington—Removes to Mr. Ireland's, at Brislington—Meets Henry Venn—Attends Wesley's Conference—Rev. David Lloyd—James Rogers visits Fletcher—Letter to Rev. V. Perronet—Unpublished letter to Miss Bosanquet—Lady Mary Fitzgerald—Letters to her and to Mrs. Thornton—Preparing to leave England—Farewell letters . . . . 376—408

CHAPTER XXI.

A LONG RETIREMENT. 1778—1781.

Journey to the south of France—Unpublished letter to Miss Bosanquet—Sermon concerning the New Birth—Letters to Rev. Mr. Greaves, W. Perronet, the Wesley Brothers, and Dr. Conyers—The Perronet estate in Switzerland—Unpublished letter to Mr. Power—Fletcher among children—Fletcher and his nephew—Messages to Madeley—Preaching at an execution—William Perronet joins Fletcher—A perilous journey—Letter to Mr. Ireland—Letters to Madeley—Other letters—Trials in Switzerland—An attack of rheumatism—Letter to his curate—National distress—Methodist meeting house at Madeley Wood—W. Perronet's unpublished letter—In a "miserable lodging"—Loss of manuscripts—Religion in Switzerland—Letters to Madeley—House of Fletcher's nativity—Letters to W. Wase, J. Owen, and M. Onions—Joins Mr. Ireland at Montpelier—Return to England—Thomas Rankin visits Fletcher at Brislington—Unpublished letter to Miss Bosanquet. . . . . 409—450

CHAPTER XXII.

LITERARY WORK DONE IN RETIREMENT.

"*La Grace et la Nature*"—"*The Portrait of St. Paul.*" 451—459

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST THREE MONTHS AFTER THE RETURN TO MADELEY. 1781

Affairs in confusion—Letter to Wesley—Rev. Cornelius Bayley—Correspondence with Miss Loxdale—Letters to Wesley and T. Rankin—Attends Wesley's Conference at Leeds—Joseph Pescod's letter—Fletcher the guest of Miss Bosanquet—A remarkable meeting at Leeds—Sanctification—Visits Sheffield . . . 460—472

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLETCHER'S MARRIAGE. 1781.

Letters to Miss Perronet and to Lady Mary Fitzgerald—History of Miss Bosanquet—Her Orphanage at Leyton—Her fortune and her debts—Her removal to Yorkshire—She turns farmer and maltster—Debts and difficulties—Fletcher proposes to marry her—Fletcher on celibacy—Unpublished love-letter—Unpublished letters to Miss Bosanquet's uncle and her brother—Further correspondence—Settling affairs in Yorkshire—The wedding and letters respecting it . . . . 473—500

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE AT MADELEY. 1782—1783.

How Fletcher began the year 1782—Husband and wife go to Madeley—Wesley visits them—William Tranter—Dr. Jobson and L. Tyerman at Madeley—Letter to author of "The Fool of Quality"—The Methodists of Dublin invite Fletcher and his wife to visit them—Mrs. Fletcher's letter to Wesley—Fletcher has an accident which disables him—Letter to Charles Wesley—A new poem—Nathaniel Gilbert and Melville Horne—Letters to Mrs. Thornton and to John Valton—Fletcher and his wife visit the Dublin Methodists—Their successful labours—Unpublished letter, thanking them for their services—Unpublished pamphlet by Fletcher—Fletcher begins Sunday schools at Madeley—Rev. H. Venn visits Fletcher . . . . . 501—529

CHAPTER XXVI.

LAST DAYS ON EARTH. 1784—1785.

Dr. Coke and his friends begin the Methodist Missionary Society—Fletcher one of the first subscribers—Unpublished letter by Dr. Coke—Fletcher's unpublished letter to Rev. Mr. Bouverot—Dr. Priestley—Fletcher's "*Rational Vindication of the Catholic Faith*"—Fletcher's "*Socinianism Unscriptural*"—Fletcher's Millenarianism—Unpublished letters to Mrs. Smyth and to Lady Mary Fitzgerald—Fletcher at Wesley's Conference at Leeds—Sermons preached—Fletcher a peacemaker—Remarkable scene—Fletcher objected to—Enoch Wood and Fletcher's discourse on Wesley's bust—Fletcher in his "Sentry Box"—Letter to his god-son—Rev. Charles Simeon visits Fletcher—Modified millenarianism—Letters to Rev. Peard Dickenson and Rev. Melville Horne—Mrs. Fletcher ill of fever—Letter to Lady Mary Fitzgerald—Fletcher ill of fever—Mrs. Fletcher's account of him—Last service in Madeley Church—Dying—Death and burial—Mrs. Fletcher's letter to C. Wesley—Wesley preaches Fletcher's funeral sermon—Testimonies concerning Fletcher—Inscription on his tombstone—Inscription on the tablet in City Road Chapel . . . . 530—575

INTRODUCTION.

EIGHTEEN years before his death, Wesley wrote the following letter to Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley—

"*January*, 1773.

"DEAR SIR,—What an amazing work has God wrought in these kingdoms, in less than forty years! And it not only continues, but increases, throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland; nay, it has lately spread into New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina. But the wise men of the world say, 'When Mr. Wesley drops, then all this is at an end!' And so it surely will, unless, before God calls him hence, one is found to stand in his place. For, *ουκ αγαθον πολυκοιρανιη. Εις κοιρανος εστω.* I see more and more, unless there be one *προεστως*, the work can never be carried on. The body of the preachers are not united: nor will any part of them submit to the rest; so that either there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end.

"But who is sufficient for these things? qualified to preside both over the preachers and people? He must be a man of faith and love, and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and things, particularly of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a ready utterance; diligence and activity, with a tolerable share of health. There must be added to these favour with the people, with the Methodists in general. For, unless God turn their eyes and their hearts towards him, he will be quite incapable of the work. He must likewise have some degree of learning, because there are many adversaries, learned as well as unlearned, whose mouths must be stopped. But this cannot be done unless he be able to meet them on their own ground.

"But has God provided one so qualified? Who is he? Thou art the man! God has given you a measure of loving faith, and a single eye to His glory. He has given you some knowledge of men and things, particularly of the old plan of Methodism. You are blessed with some health, activity, and diligence, together with a degree of learning. And to these He has lately added, by a way none could have foreseen, favour both with the preachers and the whole people. Come out in the name of God! Come to the help of the Lord against the mighty! Come while I am alive and capable of labour!

> '*Dum superest Lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me*
> *Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo.*'

Come while I am able, God assisting, to build you up in faith, to ripen your gifts, and to introduce you to the people. *Nil tanti.* What possible employment can you have, which is of so great importance?

"But you will naturally say, 'I am not equal to the task; I have neither grace nor gifts for such an employment.' You say true; it is certain you have not. And who has? But do you not know Him who is able to give them? perhaps not at once, but rather day by day: as each is, so shall your strength be. 'But this implies,' you may say, 'a thousand crosses, such as I feel I am not able to bear.' You are not able to bear them *now*, and they are not now come. Whenever they do come, will He not send them in due number, weight, and measure? And will they not all be for your profit, that you may be a partaker of His holiness?

"Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood, come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labour of

"Your affectionate friend and brother,

"JOHN WESLEY."[1]

In all respects, Wesley's letter is remarkable. He wished Methodism to be perpetuated; but he was convinced that this could not be done unless the ruling and administrative power could be confided, not to the Conference, or to a committee of the Conference, but to a single person. His description of the necessary qualifications of such a ruler is worthy of being studied. Especially ought Methodist preachers and the Methodist people all over the world, and in all generations, to notice the fact that Wesley's first and pre-eminent qualification was that he who "presided both over the preachers and people must be a man of faith and love, and one who had a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God." For thirty-eight years, since he left the Oxford University, Wesley's labours had been herculean and incessant. His health had begun to fail; so much so, that, only a few months before he wrote to Fletcher, his friends in London had become alarmed by signs of age and debility, and had contributed to provide him a carriage in which to pursue those extensive and laborious journeys, which hitherto he had made on horseback. In Edinburgh, he had undergone a medical examination by Dr. Monro, Dr. Gregory, and Dr. Hamilton, after which he wrote: "1772, May 18. They satisfied me what my disorder was; and told me there was but one method of cure. Perhaps but one natural one; but I think God has more than one method of healing either the soul or the body."

---

[1] Dr. Whitehead's "Life of Wesley," vol. ii., p. 355.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that Wesley wished to have in training his successor; and he seems to have had no difficulty in nominating him. His brother Charles was living, and, among his itinerant preachers, there was a small band of remarkable men, including Alexander Mather, Thomas Olivers, George Shadford, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, William Thompson, Thomas Taylor, John Nelson, Thomas Rankin, Christopher Hopper, Joseph Benson, George Story, Thomas Rutherford, Richard Whatcoat, Joseph Pilmore, Francis Asbury, and others; but all these were passed over, and the man he desired and nominated to be his successor was the saintly Swiss, John William de la Flechère, Vicar of Madeley.

The character and the life of such a man must be worthy of attention. Wesley, a keen judge of men, thought him qualified to be the "προεστως" of the Methodists. His reply to Wesley's proposal need not be inserted here. The position was the highest Wesley could offer him. Was he worthy of it? Let the reader of the following pages form his own opinion. Enough has been said to justify the present attempt to delineate the man.

CHAPTER I.

FROM FLETCHER'S BIRTH TO HIS COMING TO ENGLAND

IN 1752.

JEAN GUILLAUME DE LA FLECHÈRE was a descendant of one of the most respectable families in Switzerland; a family, in fact, which was a branch of an earldom of Savoy. After his marriage, Fletcher's wife found in his desk a seal. "Is this yours?" she asked. "Yes," replied the poor country parson; "but I have not used it for many years." "Why?" "Because it bears a coronet, nearly such as is the insignia of your English dukes. Were I to use that seal, it might lead to frivolous inquiries about my family, and subject me to the censure of valuing myself on such distinctions."[1]

For some time the father of John Fletcher was a general officer in the French army, but, on his marriage, he retired from the service. Later in life, he accepted a colonelcy in the militia of Switzerland.

John, his father's youngest son, was born at Nyon, on September 12th, 1729. His birthplace was a fine old mansion, that had withstood the storms of centuries, and, like many of the ancient houses in Switzerland, was entered by a spiral stone staircase, which opened into a spacious hall. "The house where I was born," said Fletcher, "has one of the finest prospects in the world. We have a shady wood, near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all the day, and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds." From one of the windows of Fletcher's ancestral home, there was a magnificent view of hill and dale, vineyards and pastures, stretching right away to the distant Jura mountains. At a few paces from the château, there was a terrace overlooking Lake Leman, with its clear blue waters and its gracefully-curved and richly-wooded bays. On the right hand, at a distance of fifteen miles, was Geneva, the cradle of the Reformation; on the left, Lausanne and the celebrated castle of Chillon. High up in the heavens were Alpine peaks, embosoming scenes the most beautiful; and, not far away, was Mont Blanc, robed in perpetual and unsullied snow.

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 140.

Not much is known of the early life of Fletcher. A few anecdotes concerning him have been preserved by his biographers, and these shall be given in as brief a form as possible.

Wesley relates that Fletcher, "in his early childhood, had much of the fear of God, and great tenderness of conscience." One day, when he was about seven years of age, his nurse, who had occasion to reprove him, said, "You are a naughty boy. Do you not know that the devil is to take away all naughty children?" The maid's remark troubled him. He fell upon his knees and began to pray, and did not cease till he believed God had forgiven him.

His filial obedience was exemplary, but, on one occasion, he, undesignedly, offended his mother, whom he dearly loved. The good lady was speaking in too warm a manner to one of the family. Young Fletcher turned a reproving eye upon her. She was much displeased with what she conceived to be unfilial forwardness, and punished him. With a look of tender affection, he meekly replied, "When I am smitten on one cheek, and especially by a hand I love so well, I am taught to turn the other also." The mother's indignation was instantly turned into admiration of her boy.[1]

While yet a youth, he had several near escapes from an untimely death. Once, when walking upon a high wall enclosing his father's garden, his foot slipped, and he must have been killed had he not fallen into "a large quantity of fresh-made mortar."

At another time, when swimming by himself in deep water, a strong ribbon, which bound his hair, became loose, twisted about his leg, and tied him "as it were neck and heels." "I strove," said he, "with all my strength to disengage myself, but to no purpose. No person being within call, I gave myself up for lost; but when I had ceased struggling, the ribbon loosed itself."

---

[1] Gilpin's "Account of Fletcher."

On another occasion, he and four other young gentlemen agreed to swim to a rocky island, five miles from the shore. Young Fletcher and one of his adventurous friends succeeded in reaching the island, but the cliff was so steep and smooth that they found it impossible to scale its heights. After swimming round the islet again and again, they concluded that their being drowned was inevitable. Immediately after, however, they discovered a place of safety; and, in due time, a boat arrived and took them home. The other three, when only half way to the island, were rescued by a boat just as they were sinking.

A still more remarkable deliverance from a watery grave was the following: Fletcher was a practised swimmer, and once plunged into a river broader than the Thames at London Bridge, and very rapid. "The water was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse." He endeavoured to swim against it, but in vain, and was hurried far from home. When almost exhausted, he looked for a resting-place, feeling he must either escape from the water or sink. With great difficulty, he approached the shore, but found it "so ragged and sharp that he saw, if he attempted to land there, he would be torn to pieces." In his direful plight, he recommenced swimming. "At last," says he, "despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine smooth creek, into which I was swiftly carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I then did not know to be a powder-mill. The last thing I can remember was the striking of my breast against one of the piles whereon it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more till I rose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself, I was in a calm, safe place, perfectly well, without any soreness or weariness at all. Nothing was amiss but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore; one gentleman in particular, who said, 'I looked at my watch when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side, and the time of your being immerged among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.'"

Fletcher passed the early part of his life at Nyon, where he began his education. With his two brothers, he was then removed to the university of Geneva, where he was distinguished equally by his superior abilities and his uncommon diligence. The two first prizes for which he stood a candidate he carried away from a number of competitors, several of whom were nearly related to the professors. He allowed himself but little time either for recreation, refreshment, or sleep. After confining himself closely to his studies all day, he would frequently consume the greater part of the night in making notes of what he had found in the course of his reading worthy of observation.

After quitting Geneva, he was sent by his father to Lentzburg, in the canton of Berne, where, besides pursuing his other studies, he acquired the German language. On his return to Nyon, he studied Hebrew, and improved his knowledge of mathematics.

From early childhood, Fletcher loved and served his Maker. He himself relates: "I think it was when I was seven years of age, that I first began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my heart, and that I resolved to give myself up to Him, and to the service of His Church, if ever I should be fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world, and that which was in my own heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters which grace had written upon it."

"From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures," wrote St. Paul to Timothy. The same might have been said to Fletcher. His early acquaintance with inspired truth guarded him, on the one hand, from the snares of infidelity, and preserved him, on the other, from many of the vices peculiar to youth. It also qualified and emboldened him to reprove sin, and, with becoming modesty, to remonstrate with sinners. To illustrate this, his biographers relate an incident which occurred when he was only fourteen years of age. A lady and her three sons visited his sister, Madame de Botens.

The sons quarrelled, and the mother uttered a hasty imprecation. Young Fletcher was shocked, and, instantly starting from his chair, began to expound and enforce the apostolic admonition, "Provoke not your children to wrath," etc.; and then reminded his astonished auditress that her imprecation might be realized; a vaticination that soon became a fact; for, on the same day, the lady embarked upon the lake, was overtaken with a tremendous storm, and was brought to the point of perishing; and, soon after, two of her sons were drowned; and the third was crushed to death at one of the gates of Geneva.

Fletcher had wished to be a Christian minister, and his parents had wished the same concerning him; but, soon after the occurrence just related, his plans of life were entirely altered. He writes: "I went through my studies with a design of entering into orders; but, afterwards, upon serious reflection, feeling I was unequal to so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of my friends, who would have me go into the army."[1]

The friends here mentioned did not include his parents, for they were strongly opposed to his turning soldier; but now, nearly at the age of twenty, his theological reading gave place to the studying of the works of Cohorn and Vauban, the great military engineers. At this time, Portugal was sending troops to Brazil, to defend its interests there. Against the remonstrances of his parents, Fletcher went to Lisbon, there gathered a company of his own countrymen, accepted a captain's commission, and engaged to serve the Portuguese on board a man-of-war, which was preparing with all speed to sail to the Brazilian coasts. Meanwhile, he wrote to his parents for a considerable sum of money, by means of which he expected to make a small fortune in the country he was about to visit. "They refused him roughly: unmoved by this, he determined to go without the cash." Whilst waiting, however, for the ship to sail, the maid, attending him at breakfast, let the tea-kettle fall upon his leg, and so scalded him, that he had to keep his bed. "During that time," says Wesley, "the ship sailed for Brazil; but it was observed that the ship was heard of no more."

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1794, p. 219.

Wesley continues: "How is this reconcileable with the account which has been given of his piety when he was a child? Very easily: it only shows that his piety declined while he was at the university. And this is too often the case of other youths in our own universities."

Fletcher returned to Nyon, but his military ardour was not abated; and, being informed that his uncle, then a colonel in the Dutch service, had procured a commission for him, he joyfully set out for Flanders. Here, however, he was again defeated in his purpose to become a soldier. Peace was concluded; his uncle died; his hopes were blasted; and the military profession was abandoned.

This, in substance, is all that is known of Fletcher, until he came to England, as Wesley says, in 1752.

CHAPTER II.

FROM HIS COMING TO ENGLAND TO HIS ORDINATION.

1752 TO 1757.

AFTER the frustration of his hopes in Flanders, Fletcher, accompanied by other young gentlemen, embarked for England, for the purpose of acquiring the English language. At the Custom House in London they were treated with the utmost surliness. Of course their portmanteaus were examined,—never a pleasant operation, but sometimes less politely done than at others. In addition to this, their letters of recommendation were taken from them, on the alleged ground that "all letters must be sent by post." They went to an inn, where they encountered another difficulty. Unable to speak English, they were at a loss how to exchange their foreign into English money. Fletcher, going to the door, heard a well-dressed Jew talking French. The difficulty was explained; and the Jew replied, "Give me your money, and I will get it changed." Fletcher, without the least suspicion, handed the gentleman his purse, containing £90. Telling his friends what he had done, they exclaimed, "Your money's gone." His friends were wrong. Before breakfast was ended the honest Jew returned, and gave to Fletcher the full amount in English coin.

To assist him in the acquisition of the English language, Fletcher had been recommended to a Mr. Burchell, who kept a boarding-school at South Mimms, a village about four miles from Hatfield, in Hertfordshire. He was admitted into this establishment. Soon after, it was removed to Hatfield, whither he also went. Here he remained with Mr. Burchell about eighteen months, and pursued his studies with great diligence. He frequently visited some of the first families in Hatfield; and, by his easy and genteel behaviour, and his sweetness of temper, he gained the affectionate esteem of all who knew him.

On leaving Mr. Burchell's academy, Fletcher was recommended by Mr. Dechamps, a French minister, to Thomas Hill, Esq., of Tern Hall, in Shropshire, as tutor to his two sons.[1] It was whilst in the service of this gentleman that Fletcher was converted. The following is an extract from one of his letters to his brother Henry, at Nyon:—

"The news of your promotion has given me great pleasure. I feel a sincere satisfaction in the diligence with which you devote yourself to the good of society, and that you prefer a life of labour to one of indolent and useless inactivity. We may be instruments of some good in any condition of human life, if we faithfully fulfil its duties; and the more difficult our station may prove to be, the more of satisfaction is likely to result from acquitting ourselves well in it. The ambition which springs from this principle has nothing censurable in it, provided that a view to the glory of God be its motive. I delight to think that the advancement of the Divine glory is your principal end; in which case, as your influence extends over the whole city, the good you do may be very great. You will find a thousand opportunities of glorifying God by your diligence, integrity, and disinterestedness. Endeavour to find or make occasions of this sort; seize on them eagerly, and shrink not from entering into the minutest details, when the object is to do good to the bodies or souls of your neighbours. Imitate, as far as circumstances will admit, the charity of Christ; who went about doing good, and disdained not to converse with the most wretched. I dwell on this the more particularly, because the vanity and pride which reign in our native town appear to me directly opposed to the spirit of charity. If you rise above these, you will conduct yourself as a Christian, whose sole object is to advance the glory of God; and who thinks little of the esteem of man, except as it may place him in a position to do more good in the world.

"Your recreations, of which you have given me a brief sketch, are doubtless innocent, especially if they occupy no more of your time than a due attention to health, and the wants of our nature demand. Although you have often reproached me with being too austere, I am far from thinking that religion forbids the use of innocent recreations; because, being indifferent in themselves, they become useful when they are necessary for the relaxation of the body or the mind. I am not at all shocked at the tradition which informs us that St. John sometimes amused himself with a partridge which he had tamed. Happy are they who, as far as they are able, endeavour to turn their own recreations to the advantage of others, which may certainly, if not always, yet sometimes, be done. I sometimes polish shells with Mr. Hill, out of compliance with his wishes. This used formerly to put me in a bad humour, on account of the loss of time it occasioned. But I begin to find that pious thoughts may sanctify an occupation as insignificant as even this, and that a renouncing of one's own will from compliance with that of others is not without its utility.

---

[1] The elder of these sons died on coming of age; the younger became M.P. for Shrewsbury, and afterwards for Shropshire. In 1784, he took his seat in the House of Lords, as Baron Berwick. The title still exists. The old Tern Hall has long been called Attingham House.—Debrett's "Peerage" and Wesley's and Benson's "Lives" of Fletcher.

"I am now going to reply to that part of your letter in which you testify your surprise at the change which has taken place in my manner of thinking, a change which appears to have struck you in the last letters which I wrote to my father. You cry out against the severity of the principles which I have laid down; and add that, without being a prophet, you boldly predict my giving way before long to enthusiasm and all manner of bodily austerities, led on by the principles I have assumed.

"I am the less astonished, my dear brother, that you should thus speak, because it is the language of ninety-nine Christians of the present day out of every hundred, and because I myself for a long time thought like you on this point. In a certain sense, indeed, I always thought highly of religion, though at the bottom no one perhaps had less of it than I. My infancy was vicious, and my youth still more so. At eighteen I fell into what may properly be termed 'enthusiasm;' for though I lived in many habitual sins, yet because I was regularly present at public worship, not only on the Sunday, but during the week, I imagined myself religious. I made long prayers morning and evening, as well as frequently during the day. I devoted to the study of the prophecies, and to books of a religious character, all the time I could spare from my other studies.

"My feelings were easily excited, but my heart was rarely affected, and I was destitute of a sincere love to God, and consequently to my neighbour. All my hopes of salvation rested on my prayers, devotions, and a certain habit of saying, 'Lord, I am a great sinner; pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ.' In the meantime I was ignorant of the fall and ruin in which every man is involved, the necessity of a Redeemer, and the way by which we may be rescued from the fall by receiving Christ with a living faith. I should have been quite confounded if any one had asked me the following questions: 'Do you know that you are dead in Adam? Do you live to yourself? Do you live in Christ and for Christ? Does God rule in your heart? Do you experience that peace of God which passeth all understanding? Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit?' I repeat it, my dear brother, these questions would have astonished and confounded me, as they must every one who relies on the form of religion, and neglects its power and influence.

"My religion, alas! having a different foundation from that which is in Christ, was built merely on the sand; and no sooner did the winds and floods arise, than it tottered and fell to ruins. I formed an acquaintance with some Deists, at first with the design of converting them, and afterwards with the pretence of thoroughly examining their sentiments. But my heart, like that of Balaam, was not right with God. He abandoned me, and I enrolled myself in their party. A considerable change took place in my deportment. *Before* I had a form of religion, and *now* I lost it; but as to the state of my heart, it was precisely the same. I did not remain many weeks in this state; the Good Shepherd sought after me, a wandering sheep. Again I became professedly a Christian; that is, I resumed a regular attendance at church and the communion, and offered up frequent prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. There were also in my heart some sparks of true love to God, and some germs of genuine faith; but a connection with worldly characters, and an undue anxiety to promote my secular interests, prevented the growth of these Christian graces. Had I now been asked on what I founded my hopes of salvation, I should have replied, that I was not without some religion; that, so far from doing harm to any one, I wished well to all the world; that I resisted my passions; that I abstained from pleasures in which I had once indulged; and that if I was not so religious as some others, it was because such a degree of religion was unnecessary; that heaven might be obtained on easier terms; and that if I perished, the destruction of the generality of Christians was inevitable, which I could not believe was consistent with the mercy of God.

"I was in this state of mind when a dream, which I could not but consider as a warning from God, aroused me from my security."

At great length Fletcher here relates his dream respecting the final judgment, and then continues:—

"For some days, I was so dejected and harassed in mind as to be unable to apply myself to anything. While in this state, I attempted to copy some music, when a servant entered my chamber. Having noticed my employment, he said, 'I am surprised, Sir, that you, who know so many things, should forget what day this is, and that you should not be aware that the Lord's day should be sanctified in a very different manner.'

"The sterling character of the man, his deep humility, his zeal for the glory of God, his love to his neighbours, and especially his patience, which enabled him to receive with joy the insults he met with from the whole family for Christ's sake, and, above all, the secret energy which accompanied his words, deeply affected me, and convinced me more than ever of my real state. I was convinced, as it had been told me in my dream, that I was not renewed in the spirit of my mind, that I was not conformed to the image of God, and that without this the death of Christ would be of no avail for my salvation."[2]

---

[1] The long letter from which the foregoing is extracted was first published in 1826, in a "Life of Fletcher" in the French language, and

About this period of his history, Fletcher seems to have become acquainted with the Methodists. Wesley says:—

> "I have heard two very different accounts of the manner wherein he had the first notice of the people called Methodists; but I think it reasonable to prefer to any other that which I received from his own mouth. This was as follows:—
>
> "When Mr. Hill went up to London to attend the Parliament, he took his family and Mr. Fletcher with him. While they stopped at St. Albans, he walked out into the town, and did not return till they were set out for London. A horse being left for him, he rode after, and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill asking him why he stayed behind, he said, 'As I was walking, I met with a poor old woman, who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ that I knew not how the time passed away.' 'I shall wonder,' said Mrs. Hill, 'if our tutor does not turn Methodist by-and-by.' 'Methodist, Madame!' said he, 'pray, what is that?' She replied, 'Why, the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray; they are praying all day and all night.' 'Are they?' said he; 'then, by the help of God, I will find them out.' He did find them out not long after, and was admitted into the society; and from this time, whenever he was in town, he met in Mr. Richard Edwards's class. This he found so profitable to his soul that he lost no opportunity of meeting; and he retained a peculiar regard for Mr. Edwards till the day of his death."[1]

It was not, however, in Mr. Edwards's class that Fletcher found peace with God. A few months after his decease, a 12 mo. pamphlet of sixty-four pages was published by his widow, entitled "A Letter to Mons. H. L. de la Fléchère, Assessor Ballival of Nyon, in the Canton of Berne, Switzerland, on the Death of his Brother, the Reverend John William de la Fléchère, Twenty-five Years Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire." In that letter it is stated, that, "from the time he heard the Methodists, he became more and more conscious that some inward change was necessary to make him happy. He now began to 'strive with the utmost diligence according to his light, hoping by *much doing* to render himself acceptable to God.' But, one day, hearing a sermon preached by a clergyman, whose name was Green, he was convinced he did

---

printed at Lausanne. In the same year, Mr. Benson printed it as an appendix to the ninth edition of his "Life of Fletcher." In 1839, it was inserted in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*. The extract is partly taken from Benson's translation and partly from that in the magazine.

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," p. 17.

not understand the nature of *saving faith.* 'Is it possible,' said he, 'that I who have always been accounted so religious, who have made divinity my study, and received the premium of piety (so called) from the university for my writings on divine subjects,—is it possible that I am yet so ignorant as not to know what faith is?' But the more he examined, the more he was convinced of the momentous truth. He now became sensible of inbred sin, and sought, by the most rigorous austerities, to conquer an evil nature; but the more he strove, the more he saw and felt that all his soul was sin."

Mrs. Fletcher continues the narrative of his conversion by giving the following extract from his diary:—

"1755. January 12.—I received the sacrament, though my heart was as hard as a flint. The following day, I felt the tyranny of sin more than ever, and an uncommon coldness in my religious duties. I felt the burden of my corruptions heavier than ever. The more I prayed for conquest over sin, the more I was conquered. The thoughts which engrossed my mind were generally these: I am undone. I have wandered from God. I have trampled under foot the frequent convictions God has been pleased to work upon my heart. Instead of going straight to Christ, I have lost my time in fighting against sin with the dim light of reason, and the use of the means of grace. I fear my notions of Christ are only speculative, and do not reach the heart. I *never had faith*, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Then every thought, word, and work of mine have only been sin and wickedness before God, though ever so specious before men. All my righteousness is as filthy rags. I am a very devil, though of an inferior sort, and if I am not renewed before I go hence, hell will be my portion to all eternity.

"When I saw that all my endeavours availed nothing towards my conquering sin, I almost resolved to sin on, and to go at last to hell. But, I remember, there was a sort of sweetness even in the midst of this abominable thought. If I go to hell, said I, I will still love God there; and since I cannot be an instance of His mercy in heaven, I will be an instance of His justice among the devils; and if I put forth His glory one way or the other, I am content.

"But I soon recovered the ground I had lost. Christ died for *all*, thought I; then He died for *me;* and, as I sincerely desire to be His, He will surely take me to Himself. He will surely let me know before I die that He died for me. But then, I thought, this may only be in my dying hour, and that is a long time to wait. But I answered thus: My Saviour was above thirty-three years working out my salvation; let me wait for Him as long, and then I may talk of impatience. Does God owe me anything? Is He bound to time and place? Do I deserve anything at His hands but damnation?

"So I went on, sinning and repenting, and sinning again; but still calling on God's mercy through Christ. I was now beat out of all my strongholds of pride. I felt my helplessness, and lay at the foot of the throne of grace. I cried, though *coldly*, yet I believe *sincerely*, 'Lord, save me! Give me justifying faith in Thy blood! Cleanse me from my sins!' I seldom went to private prayer, but I thought, 'Perhaps this is the happy hour when I shall prevail with God;' but still I was disappointed.

"On Sunday, January 19, 1755, I heard an excellent sermon on, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I heard it attentively, but my heart was not moved. I was only more convinced that I was an unbeliever—that I was not justified by faith—and that I should never till then have peace with God. The hymn after the sermon suited the subject that had been treated of, but I could not join in singing it. I sat mourning, whilst others rejoiced in the Lord their Saviour.

"The following day, I begged of God to show me all the wickedness of my heart, and to fit me for His mercy. I besought Him to increase my convictions, for I was afraid I did not *mourn* enough for my sins. But I found relief in Mr. Wesley's Journal, where I learned that we should not build on what we feel; but that we should go to Christ with all our sins and all our hardness of heart.

"On January 21, I began to write a confession of my sins, misery, and helplessness, together with a resolution to seek Christ even unto death; but, my business calling me away, I had no heart to go on with it. In the evening, I read the Scriptures, and found a sort of pleasure in seeing a picture of my wickedness so exactly drawn in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and that of my condition in the seventh; and now I felt some hope that God would finish in me the work He had begun.

"On Thursday, January 23, my fast-day, Satan beset me hard. I sinned grievously, and almost gave up all hope; I mourned deeply, but with a heart as hard as ever. I was on the brink of despair, and yet continued to fall into sin. In the evening, I went to my friend, Mr. B——, and told him something of my state. He strove to administer comfort, but it did not suit my light. When we parted, he gave me some advice which suited me better. 'God,' said he, 'loves you, and if He denies you anything, it is for your good. You deserve nothing at His hands; wait then patiently for Him, and never give up your hope.' I went home resolved to follow this advice, though I should stay till death.

"I had proposed to meet the Lord the following Sunday at His table, and therefore looked out a sacramental hymn. I learned it by heart, and prayed it over many times, and then went to bed, commending myself to God with rather more hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked while I slept. I thought I committed that night in my sleep grievous and abominable sins. I awoke amazed and confounded, and rising with a detestation of the corruption of my senses and imagination, I fell upon my knees, and prayed with more faith and less wanderings than usual, and afterwards set about my business with an uncommon cheerfulness. It was not long before I was tempted to fall into my besetting sin, but I found myself a new creature. My soul was not even ruffled. Having withstood two or three temptations, and feeling peace in my soul through the whole of them, I began to think it was the Lord's doing. Afterwards it was suggested to me that it was great presumption for such a sinner to hope for such a mercy. I prayed I might not be permitted to fall into a delusion; but the more I prayed, the more I saw it was real; for though sin stirred all the day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord.

"In the evening I read some of the experiences of God's children, and found my case agreed with theirs, and suited the sermon I had heard on Justifying Faith. I called on the Lord for perseverance and an increase of faith, for still I felt some fear lest this should be all delusion. Having continued my supplication till near one in the morning, I then opened my Bible, and fell on these words, 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. He will not suffer the righteous to be moved.' Filled with joy, I fell again on my knees to beg of God that I might always cast my burden upon Him. I took up my Bible again, and fell on these words, 'I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed.' My hope was now greatly increased, and I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin, hell, and all manner of affliction.

"With this beautiful promise I shut my Bible, and as I shut it I cast my eye on the words, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it.' So having asked perseverance and grace to serve God till death, I went cheerfully to take my rest."

Such is Fletcher's own account of his conversion. His widow added the following:—

"I subjoin what I have heard him speak concerning this time. He still pleaded with the Lord to take a fuller possession of his heart, and to give a fuller manifestation of His love, till one day, when in earnest prayer, and lying prostrate on his face, he saw, with the eye of faith, our Saviour on the cross, and at the same time these words were spoken with power to his heart:—

"'Seiz'd by the rage of sinful men,
I see Christ bound and bruis'd and slain;
'Tis done, the Martyr dies!
His life to ransom ours is given,
And lo! the fiercest fire of heaven
Consumes the sacrifice.

"'He suffers both from men and God;
He bears the universal load
Of guilt and misery!
He suffers to reverse our doom,
And lo! my Lord is here become
The bread of life to me.'

"Now all his bonds were broken. His freed soul began to breathe a purer air. Sin was beneath his feet. He could triumph in the Lord. From this time, he walked in the ways of God, and, thinking he had not leisure enough in the day, he made it a constant rule to sit up two whole nights in the week for reading, prayer, and meditation. At the same time, he lived on nothing but vegetables, and on bread with milk and water. One end of his doing this was to avoid dining in company. Besides sitting up two entire nights every week, his custom was never to sleep so long as he could keep awake, and he always took a candle and book with him to bed. One night, being overcome with sleep before he had put out his candle, he dreamed that his curtain, pillow, and cap were on fire, but went out without doing him any harm. And truly so it was, for in the morning his curtain was found burnt, also a corner of his pillow, and a part of his cap, but not a hair of his head was singed.

"Some time after this, he was favoured with a further manifestation of the love of God, so powerful, that, he said, it appeared to him as if his body and soul would be separated. Now all his desires centred in one, that of devoting himself to the service of his precious Master, which he thought he could best do by entering into holy orders."[1]

To complete the accounts of Fletcher's conversion, in 1755, an extract from another letter must be added. In that year, writing to his brother, he insisted on the vanity of earthly pursuits, and then gave the following description of the change that had taken place in himself:—

"I speak from experience. I have been successively deluded by all those desires, and sometimes I have been the sport of them all at once. This will appear incredible, except to those who have discovered that the heart of unregenerate man is nothing more than a chaos of obscurity and a mass of contradictions. If you have any acquaintance with yourself, you will readily subscribe to this description of the human heart. Every unconverted man must necessarily be either a *voluptuary*, a *worldly-minded person*, or a *pharisaical philosopher:* or, perhaps, like myself, he may be all of these at the same time; and, what is still more extraordinary, he may be so not only without *believing*, but even without once *suspecting* it; indeed, nothing is more common among men than an entire blindness to their own real characters. How often have I placed my happiness in mere chimeras! How often have I grounded my vain hope upon imaginary foundations! I have been constantly employed in framing designs for my own felicity; but my disappointments have been as frequent and various as my projects.

"If, hitherto, my dear brother, you have beguiled yourself with prospects of the same visionary nature, never expect to be more successful in your future pursuits. One labour will only succeed another, making way for continual discontent and chagrin. Open your heart, and there you will discover the source of that painful inquietude to which, by your own confession, you have been long a prey. Examine its secret recesses, and you will discover there sufficient proof of the following truths: '*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;*' '*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*' '*The thoughts of man's heart are only evil, and that continually;*' '*The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God.*' On the discovery of these and other important truths, you will be convinced that man is an apostate being, composed of a sensual, rebellious body, and a soul immersed in pride, self-love, and ignorance; nay more, you will perceive it a physical impossibility that man should ever become truly happy till he is cast, as it were, into a new mould, and created a second time.

---

[1] Letter to Mons. H. L. de la Fléchère, 1786, p. 13.

"For my own part, when I first began to know myself, I saw, I *felt* that man is an undefinable animal, partly of a bestial and partly of an infernal nature. The discovery shocked my self-love, and filled me with the utmost horror. I endeavoured for some time to throw a palliating disguise over the wretchedness of my condition, but the impression it had already made upon my heart was too deep to be erased. It was to no purpose that I reminded myself of the morality of my conduct; it was in vain that I recollected the many encomiums that had been passed upon my early piety and virtue; and it was to little avail that I sought to cast a mist before my eyes by reasonings like these: 'If conversion implies a total change, who has been converted in these days? Why dost thou imagine thyself worse than thou really art? Thou art a believer in God and in Christ; thou art a Christian; thou hast injured no person; thou art neither a drunkard nor an adulterer; thou hast discharged thy duties not only in a general way, but with more than ordinary exactness; thou art a strict attendant at church; thou art accustomed to pray more regularly than others, and frequently with a good degree of fervour; make thyself perfectly easy; moreover, Jesus Christ has suffered for thy sins, and His merit will supply everything lacking on thy part.'

"It was by reasonings of this nature that I endeavoured to conceal from myself the deplorable state of my heart; and I am ashamed, my dear brother, that I suffered myself so long to be deluded by the artifices of Satan. God Himself has invited me; a cloud of apostles, prophets, and martyrs have exhorted me; and my own conscience, animated by those sparks of grace which are latent in every heart, has urged me to enter in at the strait gate; but, notwithstanding all this, a subtle temper, a deluding world, and a deceived heart have constantly turned the balance, for above these twenty years, in favour of the broad way. I have passed the most lovely part of my life in the service of these tyrannical masters, and am ready to declare in the face of the universe that all my reward has consisted in disquietude and remorse. Happy had I listened to the earliest invitations of grace, and broken the iron yoke from off my neck."[1]

---

[1] Gilpin's Translation of "The Portrait of St. Paul."

These extracts are long, but they are important. They contain all the known facts connected with Fletcher's conversion.

In writing to his brother, Fletcher remarked,—"At eighteen years of age, I devoted as much time as I could spare to read the prophecies of the Holy Bible;" and it is a curious fact that, in the year of his conversion, he wrote a long letter to Wesley, in which he gave a synopsis of the writings of "a great divine abroad," who had "spent fifty years in making himself perfectly master of the Oriental languages, and in comparing and explaining the various predictions scattered in the Old and New Testaments." Fletcher was well acquainted with this gentleman, and had many times conversed with him on the subjects of his life-long study. Substantially, the young man had adopted the aged man's views; and now, in a condensed form (filling, however, nineteen octavo printed pages), he presented them to Wesley. At the time, terrific wars were being waged, and, a month before the date of Fletcher's letter, the great earthquake at Lisbon had occurred. At such seasons, devout men almost instinctively begin to study prophecies, and hence no wonder that Fletcher now felt more than ordinarily interested in what, "for some years, had often been the subject of his meditations." He believed that "the grand catastrophe of God's drama drew near apace," and gave his reasons for such belief by referring first to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, "which is a rough sketch of the world's four universal revolutions;" secondly, to Daniel's vision of the four beasts; and thirdly, to Daniel's vision of the ram and he-goat, and the two thousand and three hundred days, at the end of which the "sanctuary" was to "be cleansed." Fletcher, by elaborate calculations, shows that this cleansing was to take place between the years 1750 and 1770, and the following extract will indicate what, in his opinion, the cleansing meant:—

"God is now working such a work as has not been seen since the Apostles' days. He has sent some chosen servants of His, both in these kingdoms and abroad, who, by the manifest assistance of the Holy Spirit, have removed the filthy doctrine of justification by works, and the outward Christless performance of moral duties, which pollute the sanctuary and make it an abomination to the Lord. The Holy Ghost is given, and the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers as in the days of old. I own that the cleansing is but begun; but this revolution[1] may, in all probability, be the forerunner of a greater. God has called; a few have obeyed His call. The generality still shut their eyes and ears against the tender invitations of their Lord, and continue to pollute the sanctuary and to look on the blood of the Lamb as an unholy thing. Shall not God carry on His work? Shall the creature still resist the Creator? and the arm of flesh be stronger than the living God? Not so. He will not always strive with obdurate hearts. What the gentle breathings of His Spirit cannot perform, He will do by war, sword and fire, plague and famine, tribulation and anguish. He is going to gird on His sword, and His right hand shall teach Him terrible things. Nations refuse the sceptre of His mercy; what remains, then, but to rule them with an iron sceptre, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel?"

Fletcher concludes by arguing in favour of the doctrine, that, long before the general judgment Christ will appear on earth a second time to work out His great redeeming purposes.

"Give me leave, Rev. Sir," says he, "to propose to you a thing that many will look upon as a great paradox, but has yet sufficient ground in Scripture to raise the expectation of every Christian who sincerely looks for the coming of our Lord; I mean the great probability that, in the midst of this grand revolution, our Lord Jesus will suddenly come down from heaven, and go Himself conquering and to conquer; for what but the greatest prejudice can induce Christians to think that the coming of our Lord, spoken of in so plain terms by three evangelists, is His last coming before the universal judgment and the end of the world?"[2]

There cannot be a doubt that, at this period of his life, Fletcher was what is commonly called a Millenarian. Whether his views were right or wrong, the reader must determine for himself.

When resident at Tern Hall, Fletcher attended the parish church at Atcham, a small village about five miles from Shrewsbury. Here the Rev. Mr. Cartwright was the officiating minister,[3] and was accustomed to catechise in public the children of his parishioners. On one occasion, he invited the adults who needed instruction to appear in the ranks of the catechumens, and told them that to do so would be no disgrace to them. All, however, except Fletcher, either thought that to stand among the young people would disgrace them, or that further instruction in their case was not needed. The accomplished young scholar from Switzerland, the tutor of the two sons of their county member, had a lower opinion of his excellences than the village peasants had of theirs; for, leaving his seat with an air of unaffected modesty, he took his place among the children, and became a catechumen of the village pastor.[1]

---

[1] Meaning the war then raging.
[2] *Arminian Magazine*, 1793, p. 411.
[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher," 2nd edit., p. 366.

At Atcham, Fletcher became acquainted with Mr. Vaughan, an excise officer, who gave to Wesley the following account of his deeply-revered friend:—

> "It was our ordinary custom, when the church service was over, to retire into the most lonely fields or meadows, where we frequently either kneeled down, or prostrated ourselves on the ground. At those happy seasons, I was a witness of such pleadings and wrestlings with God, such exercises of faith and love, as I have not known in any one ever since. The consolations, which we then received from God, induced us to appoint two or three nights in a week, when we duly met, after his pupils were asleep. We met also constantly on Sunday, between four and five in the morning. Sometimes I stepped into his study on other days. I rarely saw any book before him, besides the *Bible* and the *Christian Pattern*."
>
> "Our interviews for singing and conversation were seldom concluded without prayer, in which we were frequently joined by her who is now my wife (then a servant in the family), and by a poor widow in the village, who had known the power of God unto salvation, and who died some years ago, praising God with her latest breath. These were the only persons in the village whom he chose for his familiar friends; but he sometimes walked to Shrewsbury, to see Mrs. Glynne or Mr. Appleton. He also visited the poor in the neighbourhood who were sick; and, when no other person could be procured, performed even the meanest offices for them."

Besides the godly friends mentioned in this interesting statement, Fletcher had another acquaintance at Atcham, whom he visited to be instructed in singing. This gentleman supplied Wesley with what follows:—

> "I remember but little of that man of God, Mr. Fletcher, it being above nine-and-twenty years since I last saw him; but this I well remember, his conversation with me was always sweet and savoury. He was too wise to suffer any of his precious moments to be trifled away. When company dined at Mr. Hill's, he frequently retired into the garden, and contentedly dined on a piece of bread and a few bunches of currants. Indeed, in his whole manner of living he was a pattern of

---

[1] Gilpin's note, in "Portrait of St. Paul."

abstemiousness. Meantime, how great was his sweetness of temper and heavenly-mindedness! I never saw it equalled in any one. How often, when I parted with him at Tern Hall, have his eyes and hands been lifted up to heaven, to implore a blessing upon me, with fervour and devoutness unequalled by any I ever witnessed. I firmly believe he has not left in this land, or perhaps in any other, one luminary like himself."[1]

These glimpses of Fletcher, at this early period of his life, are too valuable and important to be omitted.

It is impossible to determine the exact date when he joined the Methodist Society in London, but there can be no doubt that it was as early as the year 1756, and probably a year or two earlier. Hence the following extract from a letter addressed to Mr. Richard Edwards, the leader of the London class in which Fletcher had been enrolled a member :—

"TERN, *October* 19, 1756.

"DEAREST BROTHER,—This is to let you know that I am very well in body and pretty well in soul; but I have very few friends here, and God has been pleased to take away the chief of those few by a most comfortable death. My aged father also is gone the way of all flesh. For some years, I have written to him with as much freedom as I could have done to a son, though not with so much effect as I wished. But, last spring, God visited him with a severe illness, which brought him to a sense of himself; and, after a deep repentance, he died about a month ago, in the full assurance of faith."[2]

Fletcher, at Geneva, had refused to enter the Christian ministry; now he entertained the most serious thoughts of devoting himself to it; but before doing so he wrote to Wesley, with whom he had become acquainted.

"TERN, *November* 24, 1756.

"REV. SIR,—As I look on you as my spiritual guide, and cannot doubt of your patience to hear, and your experience to answer, a serious question proposed by any of your people, I freely lay my case before you.

"Since the first time I began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my heart, which was, I think, when seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to Him and the service of His Church, if ever I was fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world, and that which was in my heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters that grace had wrote upon it. However, I went through my studies with a design of going into Orders; but afterwards, upon serious reflection, feeling I was unequal for so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of my friends, who would have me go into the army. But just before I was quite engaged in a military employment, I met with such disappointments as occasioned my coming to England. Here I was called outwardly three times to go into Orders; but, upon praying to God that if those calls were not from Him they might come to nothing, something always blasted the designs of my friends; and in this I have often admired the goodness of God, who prevented me rushing into that important employment, as the horse does into the battle. I never was more thankful for this favour than since I heard the Gospel preached in its purity. Before, I had been afraid; but then I trembled to meddle with holy things, and resolved to work out my salvation privately, without engaging in a way of life which required so much more grace and gifts than I possessed. Yet, from time to time, I felt warm and strong desires to cast myself and all my inability upon the Lord, if I should be called again, knowing that He could help me, and show His strength in my weakness; and these desires were increased by some little success that attended my exhortations and letters to my friends.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"I think it necessary to let you know, Sir, that my patron often desired me to take Orders, and said he would soon help me to a living; to which I coldly answered, I was not fit, and that besides I did not know how to get a title. The thing was in that state when, about six weeks ago, a gentleman I hardly knew offered me a living, which, in all probability, will be vacant very soon; and a clergyman, that I never spoke to, gave me, of his own accord, the title of curate to one of his livings. Now, Sir, the question which I beg you to decide is, whether I must and can make use of that title to get into Orders? For with respect to the living, were it vacant, I have no mind to it, because I think I could preach with more fruit in my own country and in my own tongue.

"I am in suspense; on one side, my heart tells me I must try, and it tells me so whenever I feel any degree of the love of God and man; but, on the other, when I examine whether I am fit for it, I so plainly see my want of gifts, and especially of that *soul* of all the labours of a minister of the Gospel—*love, continual, universal, flaming love*, that my confidence disappears; I accuse myself of pride to dare to entertain the desire of supporting the ark of the Lord, and conclude that an extraordinary punishment will sooner or later overtake my rashness. As I am in both these frames successively, I must own, Sir, I do not see plainly which of the two ways before me I can take with safety, and I shall be glad to be ruled by you, because I trust God will direct you in giving me the advice you think will best conduce to His glory, the *only* thing I would have in view in this affair. I know how precious is your time; I desire no long answer;—*persist* or *forbear* will satisfy and influence, Sir, your unworthy servant, "J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters, written by the late Rev. John Fletcher. Bath, 1791," 12mo, p. 3.

Wesley's answer to this important letter has not been preserved. Perhaps no letter was written. Wesley was now in London. Parliament met eight days after Fletcher wrote to him. Public affairs were in a critical condition, and, no doubt, Mr. Hill would feel it a duty to be present at the opening of the session. When he came to London to fulfil his parliamentary duties, it was his custom to bring his sons and their tutor with him. That Fletcher was now in London is evident from the following letter, addressed to Wesley within three weeks after the date of his former one. Of course, he would have an interview with Wesley as early as possible, and in all likelihood Wesley, at this interview, not only advised him to be ordained, but likewise dissuaded him from his purpose to return to Switzerland. There is no reference in the letter to Fletcher's proposed ordination, for, doubtless, that was a matter already settled. Fletcher had been attending sacramental services in Wesley's London chapels; and it had occurred to him that these services might be much improved, and Wesley himself considerably relieved. To say the least, the letter is full of interest, and contains a hint which, in large societies, might be profitably adopted.

"*December* 13, 1756.

"SIR,—When I have received the sacrament in your chapels, though I admired the order and decency with which that awful part of the divine worship was performed, I thought there was something wanting, which might make it still more profitable and solemn.

"As the number of communicants is generally very great, the time spent in receiving is long enough for many, I am afraid, to feel their devotion languish, and their desires grow cold, for want of outward fuel. In order to prevent this, you interrupt, from time to time, the service of the table, to put up a short prayer, or to sing a verse or two of a hymn; and I do not doubt but many have found the benefit of that method. But, as you can spare very little time, you are obliged to be satisfied with scattering those few drops, instead of a continual rain. Would not that want be easily supplied, Sir, if you were to appoint the preachers who may be present to do what you cannot possibly do yourself, to pray and sing without interruption, as at a watchnight?

"This would have several good effects: 1. Experience, as well as the nature of the thing itself, shows every sincere seeker that, as it is the fittest time to ask, and the most ordinary to receive grace, every moment ought to be improved to the best advantage. 2. Continual praying and singing would prevent the wanderings of many, who are not convinced of sin deeply enough, or influenced by grace strongly enough, to mourn and pray without interruption, if they are left to themselves. 3. It would increase the earnestness of believers; for though every one wrestles probably in his own heart both for himself and the congregation, yet their prayers would certainly have more power if united, and the general fire would increase the warmth of their affections. 4. In praying frequently for universal love, as the remembrance of Christ's bleeding love naturally directs us to do, you would add for many the benefit and comfort of a lovefeast to the advantages that attend the Holy Eucharist. 5. If the prayers were especially calculated for those that receive, is it not probable, Sir, that they would be extremely encouraged to act faith, to touch the hem of Christ's garment, to cast their burden upon Him, and to lay hold of eternal life, if they heard their weak petitions supported by the fervent prayers of their brethren, at the same time that they feed, or are going to feed, on the blessed signs of Christ's body and blood?

"It may be objected:—1. That some may prefer to pour out their souls before God according to their different frames, whether it be deadness, desertion, joy, overflowings of humility, repentance, love, etc. And so they might; but I do not see how general prayer and singing would rob them of that liberty, if they thought it more acceptable to God and beneficial to themselves; and their praying in private would not hinder the bulk of the congregation from uniting with joy in the public service. 2. That this method might bring in a confusion greater than the advantages it seems to be attended with. But could not prudence obviate this? I am sure it could; for I have seen that, or something like it, performed in a congregation of a thousand communicants without the least confusion, and to the great edification and comfort of many.

"But you are the best judge, Sir; and if I take the liberty of giving you this hint, to make of it what use you think fit, it is because you said lately in the Society that you heard willingly the observations of your people, and were ready to follow or improve them if they were just and reasonable.

"I am, Sir, your unworthy servant,
"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

Within three months after this, Fletcher was ordained. On Sunday, March 6, 1757, he received deacon's orders from the Bishop of Hereford; and priest's orders on the Sunday following from the Bishop of Bangor, in the Chapel Royal at St. James's.[2]

On the day he was ordained priest, he hastened to Snowsfields Chapel, to assist Wesley in one of those heavy sacramental services referred to in the foregoing letter. Wesley writes:—

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 93.
[2] Gilpin's "Portrait of St. Paul."

> "1757, Sunday, March 13. Finding myself weak at Snowsfields, I prayed (if He saw good) that God would send me help at the chapel, and I had it. As soon as I had done preaching, Mr. Fletcher came, who had just been ordained priest, and hastened to the chapel on purpose to assist me in the administration of the Lord's supper, as he supposed me to be alone.
>
> "Sunday, March 20. Mr. Fletcher helped me again. How wonderful are the ways of God! When my bodily strength failed, and none in England were able and willing to assist me, He sent me help from the mountains of Switzerland, and an helpmeet for me in every respect; where could I have found such another?"[1]

Thus did Fletcher begin his remarkable ministerial life in a Methodist meeting-house.

---

[1] Wesley's "Works," vol. ii., p. 376; and vol. vii., p. 415.

CHAPTER III.

FROM HIS ORDINATION TO HIS SETTLEMENT AT MADELEY.

1757 TO 1760.

FOR three years after his ordination, Fletcher was without a Church appointment. How did he spend this interval? Wesley says:—

> "He was now doubly diligent in preaching, not only in the chapels at West Street and Spitalfields, but wherever the providence of God opened a door to proclaim the everlasting Gospel. This he did frequently in French (as well as in English), of which all judges allowed him to be a complete master."[1]

As might be expected, Fletcher soon became a great favourite among the first Methodists. Almost at once, he was the highly esteemed friend of Miss Bosanquet (his future wife), Ann Tripp, Sarah Crosby, Sarah Ryan,[2] Thomas Walsh, and others, whose Methodistic fame will never perish. After his death, in 1785, Mrs. Crosby wrote:—

> "It is now eight or nine and twenty years since I was first favoured with Mr. Fletcher's heavenly conversation, in company with Mr. Walsh and a few other friends, most of whom are now in the world of spirits. At these seasons, how frequently did we feel—
>
> 'The o'erwhelming power of saving grace!'
>
> How frequently were we silenced thereby, while tears of love our souls o'erflowed! It affects me while I recollect the humility, fervour of spirit, and strength of faith with which dear Mr. Fletcher so often poured out his soul before the Great Three One, at whose feet we have lain in holy shame and silence, till earth seemed turned to heaven. I heard this heavenly-minded servant of the Lord preach his first sermon

---

[1] Wesley's "Works," vol. vii., p. 415.
[2] Tyerman's "Life of Wesley," vol. ii., pp. 286, 289.

in West Street chapel. I think his text was, '*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*' His spirit appeared in his whole attitude and action. He could not well find words in the English language to express himself; but he supplied that defect by offering up prayers, tears, and sighs. Nearly about this time he saw Miss Bosanquet, and began his acquaintance with her; but, although they highly esteemed each other, they had no correspondence for above twenty years."[1]

Fletcher still continued to be the tutor of the sons of Mr. Hill. During the sitting of Parliament, he was in London; the remainder of the year was chiefly spent at Tern Hall.[2] Whilst at the latter place, he preached, on June 19, 1757, for the first time in the church at Atcham, taking as his text, '*Ye adulterers and adultresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity against God?*" "A very bold beginning," wrote his friend Mr. Vaughan. "The congregation stood amazed, and gazed upon him as if he had been a monster; but to me he appeared as a messenger sent from heaven. It was not soon that he was invited again to preach in Atcham church, but he was invited to preach in others; first in Wroxeter, and afterwards at the Abbey Church in Shrewsbury;[3] but I doubt whether he preached more than six times in the six months he stayed in the country. On my saying I wished he had more opportunities of preaching, he answered, 'The will of God be done; I am in His hands. If He does not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer, and praise.'"[4]

In the month of May, 1757, Wesley was in the north of England and Fletcher was in London. The following letter to Wesley needs no further introduction:—

"LONDON, *May* 26, 1757.

"REV. SIR,—If I did not write to you before Mrs. Wesley had asked me, it was not that I wanted a remembrancer within, but rather an encourager without. There is generally upon my heart such a sense of my unworthiness, that sometimes I dare hardly open my mouth before a child of God, and think it an unspeakable honour to stand before one who has recovered something of the image of God, or sincerely seeks after it. Is it possible that such a sinful worm as I should have the privilege to converse with one whose soul is besprinkled with the blood of my Lord? The thought amazes, confounds me, and fills my eyes with tears of humble joy. Judge, then, at what distance I must see myself from you if I am so much below the least of your children; and whether a remembrancer within suffices to make me presume to write to you, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher," 2 edit., p. 320.

[2] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

[3] Benson says, "He also preached twice in St. Alkmond's Church in Shrewsbury."

[4] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

"I rejoice that you find everywhere an increase of praying souls. I doubt not that the prayer of the just has great power with God, but I cannot believe that it should hinder the fulfilling of Christ's gracious promises to His Church. He must, and certainly will, come at the time appointed, for He is not slack, as some men count slackness; and, although He would have all come to repentance, He has not forgotten to be true and just. Only He will come with more mercy, and will increase the light that shall be at eventide, according to His promise in Zech. xiv. 7. I should rather think that the visions are not yet plainly disclosed, and that the day and year in which the Lord will begin to make bare His arm openly, are still concealed from us.

"I must say concerning Mr. Walsh,[1] as he once said to me concerning God, 'I wish I could attend him everywhere, as Elisha attended Elijah.' But since the will of God calls me from him, I must submit, and drink the cup prepared for me. I have not seen him, unless for a few moments three or four times before divine service. We must meet at the throne of grace, or meet but seldom. Oh when will the communion of saints be complete? Lord, hasten the time, and let me have a place among them who love Thee, and love one another in sincerity!

"I set out in two days for the country. Oh may I be faithful; harmless, like a dove; wise, like a serpent; and bold, as a lion, for the common cause! O Lord, do not forsake me! Stand by the weakest of Thy servants, and enable Thy children to bear with me and to wrestle with Thee on my behalf!

"Oh bear with me, dear Sir, and give me your blessing every day, and the Lord will return to you sevenfold.

"I am, Rev. Sir, your unworthy servant, J. FLETCHER."[2]

There is no need to dwell on Fletcher's humbleness, as displayed in this letter, for that was *one* of his chief characteristics to the end of life. It may be added, however, that the letter furnishes fresh proof that Fletcher was one of the godly few who were expecting the speedy appearance of the incarnate and glorified Redeemer. It is probable that his letter to Wesley on prophecy had led Wesley to advert to the same subject, and that this was Fletcher's answer to one of Wesley's critiques.

---

[1] Thomas Walsh, one of the most remarkable of Wesley's Itinerants. To say nothing of his piety and usefulness, Wesley declared him to be the best Hebrew scholar he had ever met. He died two years after the date of Fletcher's letter.

[2] "Thirteen Original Letters, written by the Rev. J. Fletcher, 1791," p. 8.

Three weeks after the date of this letter, Fletcher preached his first sermon in *a church.* This was at Atcham, on June 19, as already stated. As in the case of Wesley, churches, however, were soon closed against him. To his friend and class-leader, Mr. Edwards, of London, he wrote :—

> "I thank you for your encouraging observations. I want them, and use them by the grace of God. When I received yours, I had not had one opportunity of preaching; so incensed were all the clergy against me. One, however, let me have the use of his church—the Abbey Church at Shrewsbury. I preached in the forenoon with some degree of the demonstration of the Spirit. The congregation was very numerous, and I believe one half, at least, desired to hear me again. But the minister would not let me have the pulpit any more. The next Sunday, the minister of a neighbouring parish lying a-dying, I was sent for to officiate for him. He died a few days after, and the chief man in the parish offered to make interest that I might succeed him; but I could not consent. The next Sunday I preached at Shrewsbury again, but in another church. The next day I set out for Bristol, and was much refreshed among the brethren. As I returned, I called at New Kingswood, about sixteen miles from Bristol. The minister offering me his church, I preached to a numerous congregation, gathered on half an hour's notice. I think the seed then sown will not be lost."[1]

Early in the year 1758, Wesley introduced Fletcher to the Countess of Huntingdon. Her ladyship wrote :—

> "1758, March 19. I have seen Mr. Fletcher, and was both pleased and refreshed by the interview. He was accompanied by Mr. Wesley, who had frequently mentioned him in terms of high commendation, as had Mr. Whitefield, Mr. Charles Wesley, and others, so that I was anxious to become acquainted with one so devoted, and who appears to glory in nothing, save in the cross of our Divine Lord and Master. Hearing that he preached in French, his native language, I mentioned the case of the French prisoners at Tunbridge. May the Lord of the harvest bless his word, and send forth many such faithful ambassadors!"[2]

Fletcher was becoming famous. Already, in his twenty-ninth year, he had gained the love and admiration of the

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher," 2nd edit., p. 38.
[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 231.

Wesley brothers, of Whitefield, and of the Methodist great "elect lady." At her request, Fletcher hied away to Tunbridge, and preached to a congregation of prisoners on their parole, who were so deeply affected by the truth, which many of them had not heard before, that they earnestly requested he would preach to them every Sunday. They proceeded even further, for they signed and sent a petition to Sherlock, Bishop of London, begging him to allow Fletcher to officiate as their weekly chaplain. Strangely enough, notwithstanding Sherlock's high repute for piety, he peremptorily rejected the prisoners' petition. Wesley says: "If I had known this at the time, King George should have known it, and I believe he would have given the Bishop little thanks."[1]

Fletcher, as usual, continued in London with his pupils until the prorogation of Parliament, when Mr. Hill and his family returned to their country home. The journey to Shropshire was made in the family coach; but, unfortunately, Mr. Hill commenced it on the Sabbath-day.[2] This was a trial to Fletcher. Hence the following letter to Charles Wesley:—

"TERN, *June* 6, 1758.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—Before I took my leave of you, the Sunday I set out, and indeed almost all the time I was at the communion table, I felt some degree of condemnation, as if, by setting out on that day, I profaned the Sabbath, and the Lord's supper; whereupon those words came strongly to my mind, 'Therefore many among you are sick and weak, and some are dead.' I immediately found myself out of order, and had much ado to reach home after the service was over. Till the horses were at the door, I thought I should not be able to go; but found myself then a little strengthened. The next day, I was much worse, and they were obliged to make room for me in the coach. The day after, I was still worse, and really thought it would be my last. About noon, while the family was at dinner, I collected what little strength I had left; and, falling prostrate before the Lord, I besought Him not to cut me off among heathens, but to grant me the favour of comforting and being comforted by some Christian at my death. This request, so contrary to true resignation, I think reached the ear of the Lord. He rebuked the rage of the fever, and sensibly filled my soul with all peace in believing; so that I saw I was yet for the land of the living. Nay, a few hours after, I found myself as well as ever; and so I continue now by God's grace.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Wesley himself not infrequently set out on his long journey to the north on Sunday.

"What have I to do but to make good use of the health and leisure I have in this retreat? I see my duty, and I form resolutions; but, alas! I carry with me a wicked heart, which enters not into these projects; and Satan is never more assiduous and eager to injure us than in retirement. I feel, however, by the grace of God, determined to sustain all the attacks of the flesh and of the devil, and to seize the kingdom of heaven by force. The Lord has been particularly gracious to me, in putting it into my heart to pray for the brethren. I have experienced more power and more pleasure in this duty of intercession than I have ever done. You will rightly judge that you are not forgotten in these poor prayers; and I hope that you also sometimes remember me.

"I hope you have overcome the scruple which prevented you from giving Mr. Maxfield full liberty to labour for the Lord among us.[1] The interest of the brethren, and no other motive, makes me desire it.

"I shall not see you in Bristol;[2] the journey of my pupils not taking place at the time expected. May the Lord be with you more and more in your labours and in your devotions! Farewell!

"JOHN FLETCHER."[3]

At this period, Sarah Ryan, with whom Fletcher had become acquainted, was acting as the housekeeper in Wesley's "New Room" at Bristol.[4] To her Fletcher addressed the following hitherto unpublished letter:—

"TERN, *October* 12, 1758.

"MY SISTER,—Where shall I begin the sad account I must give you of my numberless infidelities from the time I left you? That very day, having been called to preach in a church on our way, the freedom with which the Lord enabled me to do it puffed me up in some measure. The clear sight of the prize of my high calling was clouded, and so it remained till I got home, when it pleased God to revive my hope full of immortality, and to enable me to hunger and thirst after the everlasting righteousness that shall be brought into the souls of those in whom faith shall have its perfect work. During a few days, I rejoiced because of the power I had over the sin that most easily beset me,—I mean drowsiness; but, alas! my triumph was but short; for, if the enemy did not come in at this door, another, no less effectual, was opened to him. Just as I was going to resume my daily course of business, I was called to preach in a church at Salop, and was obliged to compose a sermon in the moments I should have spent in prayer. Hurry and the want of a single eye again drew a veil between the prize and my soul. In the meantime, Sunday came, and God rejected my impure service, and abhorred the labour of my polluted soul; and, while others imputed my not preaching to the fear of the minister who had invited me to his pulpit, and to the threatenings of a mob, I saw the wisdom and holiness of God, and rejoiced in that providence which does all without the assistance of hurrying Uzzah.

---

[1] It is difficult to determine what is meant by this; most likely Fletcher wished Thomas Maxfield to preach in the neighbourhood of Tern Hall. Five years afterwards, Maxfield left Wesley, and became an ordained clergyman of the Church of England.

[2] Wesley's Annual Conference was held in Bristol, in August, 1758.

[3] Fletcher's "Works," vol. viii., p. 154.

[4] Previous to becoming Wesley's housekeeper, Sarah Ryan, Mary Clarke, and Sarah Crosby lived together, in a small house in Christopher Alley, Moorfields. It was here that Miss Bosanquet (afterwards Fletcher's wife) formed an acquaintance with Sarah Ryan, in 1757. (See "Life of Mrs. Fletcher," by Henry Moore, pp. 17 20.)

"In general, I find I am surrounded with thousands of temptations, so much the more dangerous because they are disguised under the appearance of duties. I find, at times, such an alienation to religious duties as makes me almost question whether I have a grain of living faith. I think God has, this morning, shown me, in a clearer light than ever, that I must begin to hang upon frames no more, but learn to stand by a naked faith.

"Your unworthy brother,
"J. FLETCHER.

"P.S.—Direct to John Fletcher, under cover to Thomas Hill, Esq., M.P., at Tern, near Shrewsbury.

"To Mrs. Ryan,
"At the New Room in the Horse Fair,
"Bristol."

Thus did these earnest first Methodists watch over themselves with a godly jealousy; and thus, in addition to the Christian fellowship in their weekly class-meetings, did they tell their religious experience to each other in epistolary correspondence. To this fact, pre-eminently, Methodism is indebted for its rich biographies.

Immediately after the date of the above letter, Fletcher must have set out for Bristol, for Wesley writes:—

"In the following week" (the third week in October), "I met Mr. Fletcher, and the other preachers that were in the house at Bristol, and spent a considerable time in close conversation on the head of Christian Perfection. I afterwards wrote down the general propositions wherein we all agreed."[1]

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

No doubt, these propositions were substantially the same as those which Wesley, two months before, had presented to his Annual Conference, and which were :—

1. That Christian Perfection does not "exclude all infirmities, ignorance, and mistake."

2. That those who think they have attained Christian Perfection, in speaking their own experience, should "speak with great wariness, and with the deepest humility and self-abasement before God."

3. That young preachers, especially, should "speak of Perfection in public, not too minutely or circumstantially, but rather in general and scriptural terms."

4. That Christian Perfection "implies the loving God with all the heart, so that every evil temper is destroyed, and every thought, and word, and work springs from, and is conducted to the end by, the pure love of God and our neighbour."[1]

At the close of the year, Fletcher, as usual, was, with the family of Mr. Hill, in London, where he wrote the following to Charles Wesley. There can be no doubt that the "humiliation before he left Tern" was the imputations cast upon him on account of his failing to preach in the church at Salop, mentioned in the foregoing letter to Sarah Ryan.

"LONDON, *December* 12, 1758.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Before I left Tern, the Lord gave me a medicine to prepare me to suffer what awaited me here. This humiliation prepared me so well that I was not surprised to learn a person in London had spread abroad many false and scandalous things of me during my absence; and that the minds of many were prejudiced against me. In one sense, I took a pleasure in thinking that I was going to be rejected by the children of God, and that my Saviour would become more dear under the idea that, as in heaven, so now on earth, I should have none but Him. The first time I appeared in the chapel many were so offended that it was with difficulty they could forbear interrupting me in prayer, to tell me, '*Physician, heal thyself.*' I was on the point of declining to officiate, fearing I should only give fresh offence; indeed, I should have done so had it not been for my friend Bernon, who pressed me to stand firm, representing the triumph my silence would give my enemies. His reasons appeared to me so cogent, that, as your brother did not reject my assistance, I read prayers, and engaged to preach sometimes of a morning; which I have accordingly continued to do."[1]

---

[1] "Minutes of Conference" (edition 1862), vol. i., p. 711.

This is an unpleasant but amusing episode, and presents these first Methodists in a frame of heart and mind far from commendable. Of course, Fletcher was not faultless. Perhaps he was blameable in the sermon affair at Salop; but, as Wesley still permitted him to read prayers and to preach in the West Street chapel, London, it may be taken for granted that his offence, if an offence had been committed, was a very venial one. Some of the early Methodists had more zeal than charity.

Fletcher continued to officiate in West Street chapel, and, whilst doing so, a proposal was made which occasioned him considerable anxiety. Nathaniel Gilbert inherited an estate in Antigua. For some years, he had been the Speaker in the House of Assembly of that island. In 1758, he was in England, and resided at Wandsworth. Wesley, on January 17, 1758, preached in his house, and met two of his negro servants and a mulatto, who appeared to be much awakened. In the month of November following, Wesley baptized the two negroes. Mr. Gilbert returned to Antigua in the autumn of 1759, and, having become acquainted with Fletcher, was desirous that he should go with him to the West Indian Islands, and preach to the planters and their slaves the "glorious Gospel of the blessed God." Hence the following letter to Charles Wesley:—

"LONDON, *March* 22, 1759.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Since your departure, I have lived more than ever like a hermit. It seems to me that I am an unprofitable weight upon the earth. I want to hide myself from all. I tremble when the Lord favours me with a sight of myself; I tremble to think of preaching only to dishonour God. To-morrow, I preach at West Street, with all the feelings of Jonah. Would to God I might be attended with his success!

"A proposal has lately been made to me to accompany Mr. Nathaniel Gilbert to the West Indies. I have weighed the matter, but, on one hand I feel that I have neither sufficient zeal, nor grace, nor talents to expose myself to the temptations and labours of a mission in the West Indies; and, on the other, I believe that if God calls me thither, the time is not yet come. I wish to be certain that I am converted myself before I leave my converted brethren to convert heathen Pray let me know what you think of this business. If you condemn me to put the sea between us, the command would be a hard one, but I might possibly prevail on myself to give you that proof of the deference I pay to your judicious advice.

---

[1] Letters, 1791.

"I have taken possession of my little hired chamber. There I have *outward* peace, and I wait for that which is within. I was this morning with Lady Huntingdon, who salutes you. Our conversation was deep, and full of the energy of faith on the part of the Countess; as to me, I sat like Saul at the feet of Gamaliel."[1]

Charles Wesley evidently was one of Fletcher's confidential advisers, and had great influence over him. Fortunately, that influence was not used to induce him to go to the West Indies. Had he gone, in all probability his "Checks to Antinomianism" would never have been written, and his incalculable services to Wesley and to Methodism would not have been rendered.

From the concluding part of Fletcher's letter, it would seem that he was not now resident in Mr. Hill's London mansion, but had "a little hired chamber" of his own. The probability is, that, during the Easter holidays of Parliament, Mr. Hill had returned to Shropshire, and that Fletcher had remained in London to officiate for the two Wesleys in West Street chapel; and, perhaps, in the Foundery, and in the chapel at Spitalfields. Twelve months previously, the Methodist Societies connected with these three places of worship had been blessed with the unspeakably precious ministry of the never-to-be-forgotten Thomas Walsh. "Lord," said he, when leaving them on February 19, 1758, "Lord, Thou hast given me much favour in the eyes of this people. They show it by words and deeds; their prayers and tears. Reward them a thousandfold!" Seventeen days after the date of Fletcher's foregoing letter, Thomas Walsh departed this life in Dublin, in the twenty-eighth year of his age. During his last days on earth, he was pre-eminently "in heaviness," *great, distressing* "heaviness, through manifold temptations." At length, Satan was defeated, victory came, Walsh rapturously exclaimed, "He is come! He is come! My Beloved is mine, and I am His! His for ever!" And, uttering these words, he triumphantly expired.[2] Fletcher had become acquainted with Walsh by attending his ministry in Wesley's London chapels. On hearing of his death, he wrote the following impassioned letter to Charles Wesley:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 83.

[2] Morgan's "Life of Walsh."

"LONDON, *April*—, 1759.

"MY DEAR SIR,—With a heart bowed down with grief, and eyes bathed with tears, occasioned by our late heavy loss—I mean the death of Mr. Walsh—I take my pen to pray you to intercede for me. What! that *sincere*, *laborious*, and *zealous* servant of God! Was he saved only as '*by fire*,' and his prayer not heard till the twelfth hour was just expiring? Oh where shall I appear! I, who am an unprofitable servant! Would to God my eyes were fountains of waters to weep for my sins! Would to God I might pass the rest of my days in crying, '*Lord, have mercy upon me!*' '*All is vanity*'—grace, talents, labours,—if we compare them with the mighty stride we have to take from time into eternity! Lord, remember me, *now* that Thou art in Thy kingdom!

"I have preached and administered the sacrament at West Street sometimes in the holidays. May God water the poor seed I have sown, and give it fruitfulness, though it be only in one soul! But I have seen so much weakness in my heart, both as a minister and a Christian, that I know not which is most to be pitied—the man, the believer, or the preacher. Could I at last be *truly* humbled, and *continue so always*, I should esteem myself happy in making this discovery. I preach *merely* to keep the chapel open until God shall send a workman *after His own heart*. '*Nos numeri sumus*,'—this is almost all I can say of myself. If I did not know myself a little better than I did formerly, I should tell you that I had ceased altogether from placing any confidence in my repentances; but I see my heart is so full of deceit that I cannot depend on my knowledge of myself.

"You are not well! Are you, then, going to leave us, like poor Walsh? Ah! stay, and permit me to go first; that, when my soul leaves the body, you may commend it to the mercy of my Saviour. The day Mr. Walsh died, the Lord gave our brethren the spirit of supplication; and many unutterable groans were offered up for him at Spitalfields, where I was. Who shall render us the same kind offices? Is not our hour near? O, my God, when Thou comest, prepare us, and we shall be ready! You owe your children an elegy on Mr. Walsh's death, and you cannot employ your poetic talents on a better subject."[1]

In this interesting letter, Fletcher prayed for success at West Street Chapel, even if the success was limited to "only one soul." His prayer was answered. At this period, there lived, in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, Owen and Alice Price, natives of Dolgelly, in North Wales. One of their four children was named Mary, and was now fifteen years of age. In 1750, when an earthquake alarmed all London, little Mary was at school. The house in which the school was kept undulated; several windows were broken; the children were thrown down on their faces; and a hoarse rumbling noise was heard for nearly a minute. Mary resolved, henceforth, to serve her Maker. She read the Bible; she prayed; but she was not happy. Some one recommended her to attend the preaching of the Methodists; but she hesitated to do this, because the Methodists were despised, and her parents were opposed to enthusiasts. At length, Mary went to the chapel in West Street, Seven Dials. It was on a Sunday morning; and in those days Methodist meeting-houses were crowded on Sunday mornings, *at nine o'clock.* Mary made her way down the aisle; the minister, who was reading the prayers, she had never seen before; but his manner, his tones, and the glancing of his eyes, were irresistibly affecting. The minister was Fletcher, and there and then Mary resolved to be a Methodist. The preaching and praying of Fletcher were greatly blessed to her soul's profit; and, after a severe struggle, she took courage to stay, at the close of the public service, to receive the sacrament. At that period in the history of Methodism, no one was allowed to remain who had not a society ticket, or a note from the officiating minister; and, accordingly, the faithful steward told the Welsh maiden she must either go to the vestry for a note, or quit the chapel. She went, and, with fear and trembling, asked Fletcher's permission to remain. "Come," cried he, "come, my dear young friend, come, and receive the memorials of your dying Lord. If sin is your burden, behold the Crucified. Partake of His broken body and shed blood, and sink into the bottomless ocean of His love." Of course, Mary stayed. For three months afterwards, she sought the Lord diligently in the means of grace; and then, under a sermon preached by Thomas Maxfield, found peace with God, through faith in Jesus Christ. In 1782, Mary Price married Peter Kruse; Wesley appointed her to be the leader of a class at City Road, where she and her husband worshipped; and, after being a godly Methodist for fifty-nine years, she peacefully expired, Joseph Benson preaching her funeral sermon, and her corpse being interred in the burial-ground behind the City Road Chapel.[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 85.

Another convert may be mentioned here. Richard Hill (afterwards Sir Richard) was the eldest son of Sir Rowland Hill, the first baronet of a distinguished and ancient family Richard was now twenty-seven years of age. From childhood, he had been blest with the strivings of God's Holy Spirit, and of late had been unutterably anxious about his soul. He writes:—

> "About October, 1757, I set myself to work with all the earnestness of a poor perishing mariner, who is every moment in expectation of shipwreck. I fasted, prayed, and meditated. I read the Scriptures, communicated, and gave much alms. But these things brought no peace to my soul; on the contrary, I saw, what I had never seen before, that all my works were mixed with sin and imperfection. My terrors increased, insomuch that I could neither eat nor sleep, and did not think it possible for me to live a week. Everybody observed how ill I looked, and I had much ado to conceal the straits I was in from all about me. After having suffered in this manner a short time, I made my case known to a clergyman; but all he said to me—which indeed was not much to the purpose—had little or no effect. What to do I knew not. Alas! I had no acquaintance with any one who seemed to have the least experience in such a case as mine. Those about me showed the greatest concern for my situation, and offered their remedies for my relief, such as company, physic, and exercise, which, in order to oblige them, I complied with; but my disorder was not to be removed by these carnal quackeries. What I wanted was a skilful physician for my soul; but where to find such an one I knew not.
>
> "I recollected, however, that once, if not oftener, the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, then tutor to two neighbouring young gentlemen, had, in my hearing, been spoken of in a very disrespectful manner, for things which seemed to me to savour of a truly Christian spirit. I, therefore, determined to make my case known to him, and, accordingly, wrote him a letter, without mentioning my name, giving him some account of my situation, and begging him, for God's sake, to meet me that very night at an inn at Salop, in which place I then was. Though Mr. Fletcher had four or five miles to walk, yet he came punctually to the appointment, spoke to me in a very comfortable manner, and gave me to understand that he had very different thoughts of my state from what I had myself. After our discourse, he went to prayer with me, and, among the other petitions that he put up in my behalf, he prayed that I might not trust in my own righteousness; an expression the import of which I scarcely knew.

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1818, pp. 360—367.

After my conversation with Mr. Fletcher, I was rather easier; but this decrease of my terrors was of short duration. I allowed that the promises he would have me apply to myself belonged to the generality of sinners, but I thought they were not intended for me. I, therefore, wrote again to Mr. Fletcher, telling him that, however others might take comfort from the Scripture promises, I feared none of them belonged to me. I told him also, that I found my heart to be exceeding hard and wicked; and that, as all my duties proceeded from a dread of punishment, and not from the principles of faith and love, and were withal so very defective, I thought it was impossible God should ever accept them. In answer to this, the kind and sympathising Mr. Fletcher immediately wrote me a sweet and comfortable letter, telling me that the perusal of the account I had given him had caused him to shed tears of joy, because he saw the Lord had convinced me of the insufficiency of all my own doings to justify me before God, and of the necessity of a saving faith in the blood of Jesus. He also sent me 'The Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Halyburton,' which book I read with greatest eagerness."

After this, Sir Richard Hill proceeds to relate how he found peace with God on February 18, 1758; then how he relapsed into doubts and fears, and lost all his comfort; and then how he wrote to Fletcher in April, 1759, and said:—

"My soul is again bowed down under the sense of the wrath of God. The broken law, with all its thunderings and lightnings, again stares me in the face. My hope seems to be giving up the ghost, and I see nothing before me but blackness and darkness for ever."

Of course Fletcher replied to this letter. Before long, Sir Richard regained his lost faith and peace, and ever afterwards went on his way rejoicing.[1]

Thus, to an important extent, was Fletcher used in the conversion of the distinguished man, who, a few years later, became one of his sturdiest opponents in the great Calvinian controversy.

In the middle of June, 1759, Mr. Hill, M.P., and his family left London for Shropshire, and, of course, Fletcher went with them. Up to the time of his departure, Fletcher continued to preach in Wesley's London chapels; but, in writing to Charles Wesley, under the date of June 1, he remarks, with his characteristic humbleness: 'I am here

---

[1] Sidney's "Life of Sir Richard Hill," pp. 21-32.

umbra pro corpore. I preach as your substitute; come, and fill worthily an office of which I am unworthy."[1]

At Tern Hall, Fletcher again enjoyed his beloved retirement, and gave himself up to study, meditation, and prayer. Indeed, his whole life was now a life of prayer. "Wherever we met," says Mr. Vaughan, "if we were alone, his first salute was, 'Do I meet you praying?' And, if we were conversing on any point of Divinity, he would often break off abruptly, and ask, 'Where are our hearts now?"[2] Solitude, however, is often invaded by Satan. It was in the garden, where were only two human beings, that the devil gained his first victory on earth; and it was in "the *wilderness*" that man's Redeemer was pre-eminently tempted by the same accursed enemy. The following, addressed to Charles Wesley, is a strange, but honest and instructive production.

"TERN, *July* 19, 1759.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Instead of apologizing for my silence, I will tell you that I have twenty times endeavoured to break it, but without effect. I will simply state the cause of it.

"This is the fourth summer that I have been brought hither, in a peculiar manner, to be tempted of the devil in a wilderness; and I have improved so little by my past exercises, that I have not defended myself better than in the first year. Being arrived here, I began to spend my time as I had determined; one part in prayer, and the other in meditation on the Holy Scriptures. The Lord blessed my devotions, and I advanced from conquering to conquer, leading every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ, when it pleased God to show me some of the folds of my heart. As I looked for nothing less than such a discovery, I was extremely surprised; so much so as to forget Christ. You may judge what was the consequence. A spiritual languor seized on all the powers of my soul, and I suffered myself to be carried away quietly by a current, with the rapidity of which I was unacquainted.

"Neither doubt nor despair troubled me for a moment; my temptation took another course. It appeared to me that God would be much more glorified by my damnation than by my salvation. It seemed altogether incompatible with the holiness, the justice, and the veracity of the Supreme Being to admit so stubborn an offender into His presence. I could do nothing but be astonished at the patience of God; and I would willingly have sung those verses of Desbaraux if I had had strength:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 86.
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

'Tonne, frappe, il est temps, rend moi guerre pour guerre,
J'adore, en perrissant, la raison qui t'aigrit.'[1]

"Do not imagine, however, that I was in a state of evangelical repentance. No: a man who repents desires to be saved; but I desired it not. I was even impatient to go to my own place; and secretly wished that God would for a moment give me the exercise of His iron sceptre to break myself to pieces as a vessel to dishonour. A bitter and cruel zeal against myself, and all the sinners who were with me, filled all my thoughts and all my desires. The devil, who well knew how to improve the opportunity, blew, without ceasing, the sparks of some corruptions, which I thought were extinguished, or at the point of being so, till at last the fire began to appear without. This opened my eyes, and I felt it was time to implore succour.

"It is now eight days since I endeavoured to pray, but almost without success. Yesterday, however, as I sang one of your hymns, the Lord lifted up my head, and commanded me to face my enemies. By His grace I am already a conqueror; and I doubt not that I shall soon be more than conqueror.

"Although I deserve it not, nevertheless hold up my hands till all these Amalekites be put to flight. "I am, etc.,

J. FLETCHER."[2]

Certainly this was strange, perhaps unparalleled experience. Paul wrote, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ *for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*" John Fletcher seemed to wish for this, that *God might be glorified.* "A fit of melancholy," says the reader; "almost insanity." That, however, is sooner said than proved. Fletcher had a great work to do, and, as in the case of his Divine Master, temptations helped to prepare him for it. Weeks after the date of the foregoing letter, he continued to write bitter things against himself. The following letter has not before been published; it was addressed "to Mrs. Ryan, at the Room in the Horse-Fair, Bristol:"—

"TERN, *September* 5, 1759.

"MY SISTER,—I have often been with you in spirit, desiring to follow you as you follow Christ; and I trust you have put up some petitions for me, that I may not run in vain, but may at last apprehend that for which I am apprehended.

"I have been taught many lessons—by man, self, and Satan—since I saw you, but doubt I am not much nearer wisdom, unless it is in this point—that I am more foolish in my own eyes. I groan to be so often diverted from the pursuit of the one thing needful; but unfaithfulness, levity, unbelief, taint those groans, and make me question their sincerity and mine. Will you try once more to spur me out of my haltings? Send me an account of the struggles you went through before you found rest. What degree of joy, fear, hope, sorrow, doubting, fervency or coldness of desire in soul and body—waking, working, and sleeping?

---

[1] "Thunder! strike! it is time; render me war for war!
In perishing, I adore the reason which incenses Thee."

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 88.

"Remember me to Miss Furley.[3] Were I less averse to writing, I would have written to her, to beg her not to faint at any time, but be a zealous follower of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises; but I trust she does not want the advice as often as I do. Let me know how she does in the Lord and in the flesh, and desire her to remember me at the throne of grace. Adieu.

"JOHN FLETCHER."

Charles Wesley proposed that, during the ensuing Parliamentary session, Fletcher should be paid for his services in the London chapels. In the same spirit of self-abasement as is displayed in the foregoing letters, Fletcher replied as follows:—

"*September* 14, 1759.

"MY DEAR SIR,—A few days ago, the Lord gave me two or three lessons on poverty of spirit, but, alas! how have I forgotten them! I saw, I felt, that I was entirely void of wisdom and virtue. I was ashamed of myself; and I could say, with a degree of feeling which I cannot describe, '*Nil ago; nil habeo; sum nil; in pulvero serpo.*' I could *then* say what Gregory Lopez was enabled to say at all times, 'There is no man of whom I have not a better opinion than of myself.' I could have placed myself under the feet of the most atrocious sinner, and have acknowledged him for a saint in comparison of myself. If ever I am humble and patient, if ever I enjoy solid peace of mind, it must be *in this very spirit*. Ah! why do I not find these virtues? Because I am

---

[1] Dorothy Furley, the youngest daughter of John Furley, a Dutch and Turkey merchant, was born at West Ham in 1730. She was converted in early life, and became acquainted with the Countess of Huntingdon, Miss Bosanquet, the Wesley brothers, Miss Johnson, Mrs. Ryan, and many others of the first Methodists, by whom she was held in high esteem. In 1764, she was married to Mr. Downs, one of Wesley's local preachers in London. After her husband's death, she removed to Leeds, and died July 28, 1807. The written directions respecting her funeral concluded with these words: "Glory, glory, glory be to my gracious God and Saviour! I live in the full assurance of faith and hope that I shall see my Saviour's face, and behold that glory which He had with the Father before all worlds, but which He left for my sake. To Him I owe all my salvation, here and to all eternity. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, dominion, and majesty, now and through all ages! Amen. Hallelujah! Amen."—*Methodist Magazine*, 1818, p. 222.

filled with *self-sufficiency*, which blinds me and hinders me from doing justice to my own demerits. O pray that the spirit of Jesus may remove these scales from my eyes *for ever*, and compel me to retire into my own nothingness.

"To what a *monstrous* idea had you well-nigh given birth. What! the labours of *my* ministry under you deserve a salary! I, who have done nothing but dishonour God hitherto, and am not in a condition to do anything else for the future! If, then, I am permitted to stand in the courts of the Lord's house, is it not for me to make an acknowledgment, rather than to receive one? If I ever receive anything of the Methodist Church, it shall be only as an indigent mendicant receives alms, without which he would perish. Such were some of the thoughts which passed through my mind with regard to the proposal you made to me in London; and I doubt whether my own vanity, or your goodness, will be able to efface the impressions they have left.

"I have great need of your advice relative to the letters which I receive from my relations, who unite in their invitations to me to return to my own country. One says, to settle my affairs there; another, to preach there; a third, to assist him to die. They press me to declare whether I renounce my family, and the demands I have upon it. My mother, in the strongest terms, commands me at least to go and see her. What answer shall I make? If she thought *as you do*, I should write to her, '*Ubi Christiani, ibi patria;*' 'my mother, my brethren, my sisters, are those who do the will of my heavenly Father;' but she is not in a state of mind to digest such an answer. I have no inclination to yield to their desires, which appear to me merely *natural*, for I should lose precious time and incur expense. My presence is not *absolutely* necessary to my concerns; and it is more probable that my relations will pervert me to vanity and interest, than that I shall convert them to genuine Christianity. Lastly, I should have no opportunity to exercise my ministry. Our Swiss ministers, who preach only once a week, would not look upon me with a more favourable eye than the ministers here, and would only cause me either to be laid in prison or to be immediately banished from the country.

"Permit me to thank you for the sentence from Kempis, with which you close your letter, by returning you another. 'You run no risk in considering yourself as the wickedest of men, but you are in *danger* if you prefer yourself to any one.'"[1]

A fortnight later, Fletcher wrote again to Charles Wesley as follows:—

"TERN, *September* 29, 1759.

"What you say about reducing a mother to despair has made me recollect, what I have often thought, that the particular fault of the Swiss is to be *without natural affection*. With respect to that preference which my mother shows me above her other children, I see clearly I am indebted for almost all the affection she expresses for me in her letters to my absence from her, which hinders her from seeing my faults. Nevertheless, I reproach myself severely, that I cannot interest myself in her welfare as much as I did in that of my deceased father. I am astonished at the difference. I believe the time is not yet come when my presence may be of service to her; and I flatter myself she will not be shocked at my refusal, which I have softened as much as I could.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 91.

"I fear you did not rightly understand what I wrote about the proposal you made me at London. So far from making conditions, I feel myself unworthy of receiving them. I trouble myself with no temporal things; my only fear is that of having too much, rather than too little, of the necessaries of life. I am weary of abundance. I could wish myself to be poor with my Saviour. Those whom He hath chosen to be rich in faith, appear to me objects of envy in the midst of their wants."[1]

Fletcher wanted no salary for preaching in Methodist chapels; and, for the present, he refused to return to Switzerland. His reason for the latter might have been more filially expressed; but no one will doubt his sincerity, or that his motives were not pure. The next letter, written two days later, was addressed to Sarah Ryan, Wesley's housekeeper at Bristol, and to her friend, Dorothy Furley. It is too full of eloquent piety to be abridged.

"*October* 1, 1759.

"DEAR SISTERS,—I have been putting off writing to you, lest the action of writing should divert my soul from the awful and delightful worship it is engaged in. But I now conclude I shall be no loser, if I invite you to love Him my soul loveth; to dread Him my soul dreadeth; to adore Him my soul adoreth.

"Sink with me before the throne of grace; and, while the cherubim veil their faces, and cry out in tender fear and exquisite trembling, 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' let us put our mouths in the dust, and echo back the solemn sound, 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' Let us plunge ourselves in that ocean of purity. Let us try to fathom the depths of Divine mercy; and, convinced of the impossibility of such an attempt, let us lose ourselves in them. Let us be comprehended by God, if we cannot comprehend Him. Let us be supremely happy in God. Let the intenseness of our happiness border upon misery, because we can make Him no return. Let our head become waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears,—*tears* of humble repentance, of solemn joy, of silent admiration, of exalted adoration, of raptured desires, of inflamed transports, of speechless awe. My God and my all! Your God and your all! Our God and our all! Praise Him! With our souls blended into one by

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 95.

Divine love, let us with one mouth glorify the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; our Father, who is over all, through all, and in us all.

"I charge you before the Lord Jesus, who giveth life and more abundant life; I entreat you by all the actings of faith, the stretchings of hope, the flames of love you have ever felt, sink to greater depths of self-abasing repentance; rise to greater heights of Christ-exalting joy. And let Him, who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think, carry on, and fulfil in you the work of faith with power; with that power whereby He subdueth all things unto Himself. Be steadfast in hope, immovable in patience and love, always abounding in the outward and inward labour of love; and receive the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

"I am, dear sisters, your well-wisher,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

Mr. Benson inclines to think that it was at this period that Fletcher first preached at Madeley. The Rev. Mr. Chambers was the vicar, and frequently desired the tutor of Mr. Hill's sons to assist him in his ministerial duties. Tern Hall was ten miles from Madeley, and one of Mr. Hill's grooms was ordered to have a horse ready for Fletcher's use every Sunday morning. So great, however, was his aversion to giving trouble to any one, that, if the groom did not awake at the proper time, he seldom would suffer him to be called; but prepared the horse for himself.[2]

Parliament was opened on November 13, when, as usual, Mr. Hill and his family repaired to London. Two days afterwards, Fletcher wrote the following to Charles Wesley:—

"LONDON, *November* 15, 1759.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Your letter was not put into my hands till eight days after my arrival in London. I carried the enclosed to its address, and passed three hours with a modern prodigy,—*an humble and pious countess*. I went with trembling, and in obedience to your orders; but I soon perceived a little of what the disciples felt when Christ said to them, '*It is I, be not afraid.*'

"Her ladyship proposed to me something of what you hinted to me in your garden,—namely, to celebrate the communion sometimes at her house of a morning, and to preach when occasion offered,—in such a manner, however, as not to restrain my liberty, nor to prevent me assisting you, or preaching to the French refugees; and that only till Providence should clearly point out the path in which I should go. Charity, politeness, and reason accompanied her offer; and I confess, in spite of the resolution, which I had almost *absolutely* formed, to fly the houses of the great, without even the exception of the Countess's, I found myself so greatly changed, that I should have accepted, on the spot, her ladyship's proposal; but my engagement with you withheld me; and, after thanking her, I said, when I had reflected on her obliging offer, I would do myself the honour of waiting upon her again.

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters," by Rev. John Fletcher, 1791, p. 9.

[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"Nevertheless, two difficulties stand in my way. Will it be consistent with the poverty of spirit, which I seek? Can I accept an office for which I have such small talents? And shall I not dishonour the cause of God, by stammering out the mysteries of the Gospel in a place where the most approved ministers of the Lord have preached with so much power, and so much success? What think you?

"I give myself up to your judicious counsels. I feel myself unworthy of them; much more still of the appellation of *friend*, with which you honour me. You are an *indulgent father* to me, and the name of *son* suits me better than that of *brother*."[1]

It hardly need be added, that the "modern prodigy," the "humble and pious Countess," was Lady Huntingdon, to whom Wesley had introduced Fletcher nearly two years before. Her ladyship's proposal really amounted to this, that, without at all interfering with his preaching for the Wesley brothers, and with his labours among the French prisoners and refugees, Fletcher should act as one of her domestic chaplains. Charles Wesley's reply to Fletcher's inquiries has not been preserved; but there can be no doubt it was favourable, for such was Fletcher's profound respect for Methodism's poet, that, if he had, in the least, disapproved of the Countess's offer, it would most certainly have been declined. "I am so assured of your salvation," wrote Fletcher, in the letter from which the foregoing is extracted, "that I ask no other place in heaven, than that I may have at your feet. I doubt even if Paradise would be Paradise to me, unless it were shared with you." This language was extravagant; but it shows the high admiration in which Fletcher, at this time, held one who might be justly called his dearest and most confidential friend. The proposal of the Countess of Huntingdon was accepted; and Fletcher opened his commission to the great and honourable in her ladyship's drawing-room, in the lowly spirit of St. Paul, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." During the ensuing winter, he preached in Wesley's London chapels, as usual; and, alternately with the Wesley brothers and other clergymen, he preached in the houses of Lady Huntingdon, Lady Gertrude Hotham, and Lady Frances Shirley, generally once, and frequently twice, in every week.[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 98.

The French prisoners and refugees have been mentioned. Unfortunately, there are no details preserved of the extent and success of Fletcher's labours among those pitiable sojourners; but there can be no doubt that it was for their instruction and benefit, that Fletcher, in 1759, published a sermon in the French language, entitled, "Discours sur la Regeneration. Imprime à Londre l'an 1759." 12mo, 48 pp. His sermon is founded upon John iii. 3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." At the end of the discourse are two short poems, in French, with the titles, "Sentiments d'une Ame que la Grace régénère;" and "Le Bonheur de l'homme Régénère." The subject and substance of the whole may be gathered from the brief preface, of which the following is a translation:—

> "Some prejudiced persons having caused it to be reported that I preach a dangerous doctrine, you will be able to judge as to that, with a knowledge of the case, by reading this discourse on Regeneration.
>
> "I beg you to read, in addition, some short pamphlets which have just appeared, and which are entitled, 'The Nature and Design of Christianity;'[2] 'Salvation by Faith;'[3] and 'Awake thou that sleepest.'[4] I recommend these three works for your examination, because, although I am not the author of them, they contain the sentiments which I wish to see engraven in our hearts, as they were in the heart of St. Paul.
>
> "If you find here the religion of Christ, give the glory to God, and let it be found in the depths of your own souls; but, if you find anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the purity of Christianity, I pray you, in the name of the Lord, to point it out to me. Conduct so kind will sensibly oblige your servant in Christ,
>
> "J. DE LA FLECHERE."

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 233.

[2] An extract from Law's "Christian Perfection," first published by Wesley in 1740; the sixth edition appeared in 1759.

[3] Wesley's "Sermon on Salvation by Faith," first published in 1738; and a tenth edition in 1756.

[4] Charles Wesley's well-known sermon, preached before the University of Oxford, on April 4, 1742.

With the exception of a tract, entitled "A Christmas Box for Journeymen and Apprentices," which, Wesley says, was printed and circulated in 1758, this "Discours sur la Regeneration" was Fletcher's earliest publication.

During the first three months of 1760, Fletcher enjoyed sweet intercourse with his beloved and confidential friend, Charles Wesley. The latter relates that he forgot his birthday till Fletcher's prayer put him in mind of it. He and Fletcher had conversations respecting the doctrine of assurance, which they both held, but which they thought had not been sufficiently guarded. In a letter, dated March 16, 1760, Charles observes,—"God has remarkably owned the Word since Mr. Fletcher and I changed our manner of preaching it."[1]

At this period, the Methodists of London took a profound interest in the fate of Earl Ferrars, brother of the Rev. Walter Shirley, and cousin of the Countess of Huntingdon. This profligate nobleman had murdered his steward, and was now awaiting his trial by the Peers of England. The unhappy culprit was executed on the 5th of May. Many were the prayers offered for his conversion. A day of fasting was kept at the Foundery.

> "Yesterday," wrote Charles Wesley, on April 4, "many met me in the chapel (West-street), to join in prayer for the murderer. Till 4 p.m. we continued looking upon Him whom we had pierced. I never remember a more solemn season. I carried Mr. Shirley and his sister to Mrs. Herritage's, where Mr. Fletcher helped us to pray for poor Barabbas, as he calls him. Again the spirit made intercession for him with groans unutterable. Our watch-night lasted from seven to half-past ten. My text was, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,' etc. (Lamentations of Jeremiah i. 12). The Word was sent, I believe, to many hearts. Mr. Fletcher seconded it. We both prayed *after* God, particularly for the criminal. The chapel was excessively crowded, and therefore very hot. Miss Shirley carried me to my lodgings. It was past eleven before John Fletcher and I got to rest."[2]

The last words of this extract almost indicate that Charles Wesley and Fletcher were living together, in the same house; but, be that as it may, there cannot be a doubt of the warm friendship that existed between them.

---

[1] C. Wesley's Journal, vol. ii., p. 227. [2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 231.

Besides preaching in Wesley's London chapels, Fletcher occasionally preached for the Countess of Huntingdon, at Brighton.[1] He also visited Berridge at Everton. Hence the following, addressed to Charles Wesley :—

"DUNSTABLE, *March* 1, 1760.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I have had a pleasant journey as to my body, but an unhappy one for my soul. Everything required that I should cry without ceasing, '*Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!*' but, alas! I have not done so. The fine weather invites me to execute a design, I had half formed, of making a forced march to spend next Sunday at Everton, Mr. Berridge's parish. May the voice of the Lord there be heard by a poor child of Adam, who, like him, is still behind the trees of his stupidity and impenitence!

"If I do not lose myself across the fields before I get there, and if the Lord is pleased to grant me the spirit of supplication, I will pray for you, until I can again pray with you. Don't forget me, I beseech you. I would fain be with you on those solemn occasions, when a thousand voices are raised to heaven to obtain those graces which I have not; but God's will be done!

"Don't forget to present my respects to the Countess. If I continue any time at Everton, I shall take the liberty of giving her some account of the work of God in these parts; if not, I will give it her in person. Adieu. "JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

Strange scenes had recently been witnessed at Everton and in the surrounding country; and it is not surprising that Fletcher was desirous of seeing what the hand of God had wrought. His visit was a memorable one. On arriving, he introduced himself to Berridge "as a new convert, who had taken the liberty to wait upon him for the benefit of his instruction and advice." Berridge, perceiving he was a foreigner, asked what countryman he was.

"A Swiss, from the canton of Berne," was the reply.

"From Berne! then probably you can give me some account of a young countryman of yours, John Fletcher, who has lately preached a few times for the Messrs. Wesley, and of whose talents, learning, and piety, they both speak in terms of high eulogy. Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir, I know him intimately; and did those gentlemen know him as well they would not speak so highly of him. He is more obliged to their partial friendship than to his own merits."

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 233.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 100.

"You surprise me," said Berridge.

"I have the best reason for speaking of John Fletcher as I do. I am John Fletcher."

"If you be John Fletcher," replied Berridge, "you must take my pulpit to-morrow."[1]

Thus began Fletcher's acquaintance with Berridge. No doubt he preached at Everton, for strong-willed Berridge was wont to have his way. It is probable that Fletcher communicated what he had seen and heard to the Countess of Huntingdon. At all events, it is said, her ladyship, accompanied by Martin Madan and Henry Venn, hastened to join him there. On the morning after their arrival, at seven o'clock, Berridge preached to an enormous congregation, assembled in a field near his church. At eleven, in the church, Mr. Hicks read prayers, and Venn explained the "joy that is in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." In the afternoon, to an amazing multitude gathered from all parts of the surrounding country, Martin Madan cried, in the open air, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Next day, in the morning, Fletcher read prayers, and Madan preached from "Ye must be born again," the church being crowded to excess, and the windows filled within and without. In the afternoon, the prayers were read by Berridge, and Venn enforced the words, "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Large numbers being unable to gain admission to the church, Berridge addressed those outside from, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near." The third day's services were even more remarkable than the previous ones. It was calculated that, in the small village of Everton, ten thousand persons were assembled to hear the Word of God, and to join in His holy services. The number is almost incredible; and picturesque must have been the travelling tribes as they journeyed to this "hill of Zion." Venn preached, of course, in the open air, from the text, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." The huge congregation was deeply affected, and several persons, both men and women, fell to the ground and wept bitterly. The afternoon congregation was even greater than that in the morning. At night, Berridge was the preacher, and selected as his text, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." Towards the close of his sermon, five persons "sunk down as dead;" and others cried with a loud and bitter cry, "What must we do to be saved?" Berridge concluded his discourse; and these memorable three days' services were finished by the assembled thousands, the Countess, and the five clergymen, all joining in singing Wesley's noble hymn,—

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 25.

"Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!
  Thine own immortal strength put on!
With terror clothed, hell's kingdom shake,
  And cast Thy foes with fury down!

"As in the ancient days appear!
  The sacred annals speak Thy fame:
Be now omnipotently near,
  To endless ages still the same.

"Thy arm, Lord, is not shortened now,
  It wants not now the power to save;
Still present with Thy people, Thou
  Bear'st them through life's disparted wave.

"By death and hell pursued in vain,
  To Thee the ransomed seed shall come,
Shouting their heavenly Sion gain,
  And pass through death triumphant home.

"The pain of life shall there be o'er,
  The anguish and distracting care,
There sighing grief shall weep no more,
  And sin shall never enter there.

"Where pure, essential joy is found,
  The Lord's redeemed their heads shall raise,
With everlasting gladness crowned,
  And filled with love, and lost in praise."[1]

What pen can adequately describe this grand outburst of scriptural faith and Christian exultation? It was a scene that has not oft been equalled; and, no doubt, helped to increasingly qualify Fletcher for the great work that awaited him.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 400.

Fletcher's duties as a tutor were now ended. The two sons of Mr. Hill had become undergraduates at Cambridge. Fletcher seems to have returned to Tern Hall; but, as a new Parliament was about to be elected, Mr. Hill objected to the ordained tutor preaching in the neighbourhood of the Hall, because his well-known Methodist proclivities might raise a stumbling-block at the polling-booths. Hence the following extract from a letter addressed to the Countess of Huntingdon:—

> "TERN, *September* 6, 1760.
>
> "The fear Mr. Hill has, that I should lessen his interest at Shrewsbury at the next election,—the shyness of the neighbouring clergy,—and the want I feel of an ordination from the great Shepherd and Bishop of my soul, will probably prevent my preaching at all in the country. O may the Spirit of God preach the Gospel to my heart!
>
> "Generous as you are, Madam, I believe you would have saved me the shame of receiving the present you made me at Paddington, had you foreseen the uneasy thoughts it raised in my heart. 'Is not this making godliness a gain? Can I in conscience receive what is devoted to the poor when I am not in actual want?' I am not ashamed of living upon charity, but to receive it, without being an immediate object of charity, gives me more uneasiness than want could possibly do. And now I am deprived, for many months, of the unspeakable advantage of living upon Providence, and must live upon a stock, as well as the rich of this world! Is not this a lesson? And does not your generosity, Madam, bid me look to Jesus for *poverty of spirit*, without which all outward acts are nothing but pride, sin, misery, and lies?
>
> "I am, with gratitude and shame, your ladyship's unworthy servant,
>
> "J. FLETCHER."[1]

Fletcher was without employment. What was the best course to take? He might have permanently united himself to the Wesley brothers; or he might have devoted himself to the congregations of the Countess of Huntingdon. But another path was marked out for him by an unerring Providence. He had been of great service to the sons of Mr. Hill; and Mr. Hill was desirous of promoting his preferment. The living of Dunham, in Cheshire, was now vacant, and Mr. Hill informed Fletcher that it was at his service. "The parish," said he, "is small, the duty light, the income good (£400 per annum), and it is situated in a fine, healthy, sporting country." "Alas!" replied Fletcher, "alas, Sir, Dunham will not suit me; there is too much money, and too little labour." "Few clergymen make such objections," rejoined Mr. Hill. "It is a pity to decline such a living, especially as I know not that I can find you another. What shall we do? Would you like Madeley?" "That, Sir," said Fletcher, "would be the very place for me." "My object," answered Mr. Hill, "is to make you comfortable in your own way. If you prefer Madeley, I shall find no difficulty in persuading Mr. Chambers to exchange it for Dunham, which is worth more than twice as much as Madeley."[1]

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 234.

An arrangement was soon made. Mr. Hill's nephew was the patron of the Madeley living; and Mr. Hill himself the patron of that of Dunham. The uncle and nephew met at Shrewsbury races, and there, on a *racecourse*, of all places in the world, it was settled that the Madeley living should be offered to Fletcher. The presentation was made; but Fletcher, at the last moment, hesitated to accept it, and wrote to his friend Charles Wesley as follows:—

"TERN, *September* 26, 1760.

"A fortnight ago, the minister of this parish, with whom I have had no connection for these two years, sent me word (I know not why) that his pulpit should be at my service at any time.

"Some days after, I ventured a visit of civility to the vicar of a neighbouring parish, who fell out with me, three years ago, for preaching faith in his church. He received me with the greatest kindness, and said often, he would have me take the care of souls somewhere or other.

"Last Sunday, the vicar of Madeley, to whom I was formally curate, coming to pay a visit here, expressed great regard for me; seemed to be quite reconciled: and assured me, that he would do all he could to serve me; of which he yesterday gave me a proof, by sending me a testimonial unasked.

"He was no sooner gone, than news was brought that the old clergyman" (at Dunham) "died suddenly the day before; and that same day, before I heard it, Mr. Hill, meeting, at the races, his nephew, who is patron of Madeley, told him, if he would present me to Madeley, he would give the vicar of that parish the living vacated by the old clergyman's death. This was immediately agreed to, as Mr. Hill himself informed me in the evening, wishing me joy.

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 32.

"You have repeatedly advised me not to resist Providence, but to follow its leadings. I am, however, inwardly in suspense. My heart revolts at the idea of being here alone, opposed by my superiors, hated by my neighbours, and despised by all the world. Without piety, without talents, without resolution, how shall I repel the assaults, and surmount the obstacles which I foresee, if I discharge my duty at Madeley with fidelity? On the other hand, to reject this presentation, to burn this certificate, and to leave in the desert the sheep whom the Lord has evidently brought me into the world to feed, appears to me nothing but obstinacy and refined self-love. I will hold a middle course between these extremes: I will be wholly *passive* in the steps I must take; and *active* in praying the Lord to deliver me from the evil one, and to conduct me in the way He would have me to go.

"If you see anything better, inform me of it speedily; and, at the same time, remember me in all your prayers, that, if this matter be not of the Lord, the enmity of the Bishop of Lichfield, who must countersign my testimonials; the threats of the chaplain of the Bishop of Hereford, who was a witness to my preaching at West Street; the objections drawn from my not being naturalized; or some other obstacle, may prevent the kind intentions of Mr. Hill."[1]

Within a week after the date of this communication, several of Fletcher's anticipated obstacles were gone. Hence the following, from a letter addressed to the Countess of Huntingdon, who was visiting the Rev. Benjamin and Lady Margaret Ingham, in Yorkshire:—

"1760, October 3.—Were I to have my choice, I would prefer waiting at the pool under your roof, or that of those who think like you, to any other way of life; and I will own to your ladyship, that the thought of giving this up is one of the chief difficulties I have now to encounter. But I seem to be a prisoner of Providence, who is going, in all probability, to cast my lot among the colliers and forge-men of Madeley. The two thousand souls of that parish, for whom I was called into the ministry, are many sheep in the wilderness, which I cannot sacrifice to my own private choice.

"When I was suffered to attend them, for a few days, some began to return to the Shepherd of their souls, and I found it then in my heart to spend and be spent for them. It is true, when I was sent away from them, that zeal cooled to such a degree, that I have wished a thousand times they might never be committed to my care; but the impression of the tears of those who, when I left them, ran after me crying, 'Who will now show us the way to heaven?' never quite wore off, and, upon second thoughts, I always concluded that, if the Lord made my way plain to their church, I could not run away from it without disobeying the order of Providence.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 106.

"That time is come. The church is vacated; the presentation to it brought, unasked for, into my hands; the difficulty of getting proper testimonials, which I looked upon as insurmountable, vanishes at once; the three clergymen that had opposed me with the most bitterness, signed them; the Bishop of Lichfield countersigns them without the least objection; the lord of the manor, my great opposer, leaves the parish; and the very man (the vicar), who told me I should never preach in that church, now recommends me to it, and tells me he will induct me himself.

"Are not these intimations of the will of God? It seems so to me. What does your ladyship think? I long to go and consult you in Yorkshire, but cannot do it now, without giving up the point on which I want your advice."[1]

There is, or, at least, there used to be, in the parish vestry at Madeley, a book containing the following inscription:—"John Fletcher, clerk, was inducted to the vicarage of Madeley, the 17th of October, 1760. John Fletcher, vicar."

The deed was done. Wesley had strongly opposed his acceptance of the Madeley living, telling him that to take a living was not his calling. Charles Wesley's advice is unknown; but, probably, it was the reverse of his brother's. John desired and greatly needed the help of an ordained clergyman, not only to preach, but to administer the sacraments to the multiplying Methodists. He tried to retain Fletcher, a minister to his own heart's content; but he failed. It was well he did. In the itinerancy, Fletcher's time for reading and study would have been extremely limited. At Madeley, he had abundance of leisure for both, and, during the next ten years, acquired that theological wealth, which, in the hour of need, enabled him to be of the greatest service to Wesley, by the writing of his unanswerable "Checks to Antinomianism."

Wesley's opposition is mentioned in the following extracts from two letters addressed to the Countess of Huntingdon:—

"1760, October 28. All the little circumstances of my institution and induction have taken such an easy turn, that I question whether any clergyman ever got over them with less trouble. I preached last Sunday, for the first time, in my church, and shall continue to do so, though I propose staying with Mr. Hill till he leaves the country, which will be, I suppose, in a fortnight, partly to comply with him to the last, and partly to avoid falling out with my predecessor, who is still at Madeley, but who will remove about the same time.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 237.

"Among many little providences, I shall mention one to your ladyship. The Bishop having unexpectedly sent me word to go to him for institution without delay, if I wished not to be at the trouble of following him to London, I set out in haste for Hereford, where I arrived the day before his lordship's departure. As I went along, I thought that if my going to Madeley was from the Lord, it was providential that I should thus be called to be instituted in the country, for were it to be in London, Sir Peter Rivers, the Bishop's chaplain, who examined me for orders, and who made so much noise last summer in West Street Chapel, where he found me preaching, would infallibly defeat the end of my journey, according to his threatenings. Thus did worldly wisdom work in my heart; but no divination can stand against the God of Jacob, who is a jealous God, and does not give His glory to another. A clergyman, named Sir Dutton Colt, came to see the Bishop just as I entered the palace, and the secretary, coming to him, said in my hearing, 'Sir Peter is just come from London to take possession of a prebend, which the Bishop has given him; he is now in the palace; how do you rank with him?' My surprise was great, for a moment, and my first thought was to ride away without institution; but, having gone too far to retreat, I had an instant strength from on high to be still and see the salvation of the Lord. My second thought was to thank God for sending this man from London in that point of time to defeat Mr. Hill's design; and, easily throwing up Madeley, I cried for strength to make a good confession before the high priest and the scribe; and I felt I had it, but I was not called to use it, for the Bishop was alone, the ceremony was over in ten minutes, and Sir Peter did not come in till after. I met him at the door of the Bishop's room, and a wig I had on that day prevented his recollecting who I was. Your ladyship cannot conceive how thankful I was for this little incident, not because I was not disappointed of a living, but because I saw and felt, that, had I been disappointed, it would have been no disappointment to me.

"If I know anything of myself, I shall be much more ready to resign my benefice, when I have had a fair trial of my unprofitableness to the people committed to my care, than I was to accept it. Mr. John Wesley bids me do it without a trial. He will have me 'see the devil's snare, and fly from it at the peril of my soul.' I answer, I cannot see it in that light. He adds, 'Others may do well in a living; you cannot; it is not your calling.' I tell him, I readily own that I am not fit to plant or water any part of the Lord's vineyard; but that *if* I am called at all, I am called to preach at Madeley, where I was first sent into the ministry, and where a chain of providences, I could not break, has again fastened me; and that, though I may be as unsuccessful as Noah, yet I am determined to try to be there a preacher of Christ's righteousness;

and that, notwithstanding my inability, I am not without hopes, that He who reproved a prophet's madness by the mouth of an ass, may reprove a collier's profaneness even by my mouth.

"I reserve for another letter an account of my own soul, and of what begins to be as dear to me as my own soul—*my parish*."[1]

The other letter, here promised, was written three weeks later. The following is an extract from it:—

"TERN, *November* 19, 1760.

"I have hitherto written my sermons, but I am carried so far beyond my notes when in the pulpit, that I propose preaching with only my sermon-case in my hand next Friday, when I shall venture on an evening lecture for the first time. I question whether I shall have above half-a-dozen hearers; but I am resolved to try.

"The weather and the roads are so bad, that the way to the church is almost impracticable; nevertheless all the seats were full last Sunday. Some begin to come from adjacent parishes, and some more (as they say) *threaten* to come when the season permits.

"I cannot yet discern any deep work, or indeed anything but what will always attend the crying down of man's righteousness, and the insisting upon Christ's—I mean a general liking among the poor; and offence, ridicule, and opposition among the 'reputable' and 'wise' people. Should the Lord vouchsafe to plant the Gospel in this county, my parish seems to be the best spot for the centre of such a work, as it lies among the most populous, profane, and ignorant.

"But it is well if, after all, there is *any* work in my parish. I despair even of this, when I look at myself, and quite fall in with Mr. John Wesley's opinion about me; though I sometimes hope the Lord has not sent me here for nothing. I am, however, fully determined to resign my living, if the Lord does not think me worthy to be His instrument. I abhor the title of a living for a living's sake; it is death to me.

"There are three meetings in my parish—a Papist, Quaker, and Baptist, and they begin to call the fourth *the Methodist* one—I mean the Church. But the bulk of the inhabitants are stupid heathens, who seem past all curiosity, as well as all sense of godliness. I am ready to run after them into their pits and forges, and I only wait for Providence to show me the way. I am often reduced to great perplexity; but the end of it is sweet. I am driven to the Lord, and He comforts, encourages, and teaches me. I sometimes feel that zeal which forced Paul to wish to be accursed for his brethren's sake; but I want to feel it without interruption. The devil, my friends, and my heart have pushed at me to make me fall into worldly cares and creature snares,—first, by the thoughts of marrying; then, by the offers of several boarders, one of whom, a Christian youth, offered me £60 a year; but I have been enabled to cry, '*Nothing but Jesus, and the service of His people;*' and I trust the Lord will keep me in the same mind."[1]

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 238.

In such a way and spirit did Fletcher begin his ministry of twenty-five years' duration at Madeley. Comment on his simple and honest letters is unnecessary; it would be uninstructive meddling, which would try the reader's patience.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 239.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST TWO YEARS AT MADELEY.

FROM OCTOBER 17, 1760, TO NOVEMBER 22, 1762.

ALMOST of necessity, the life of a clergyman in a small country town is an uneventful and quiet one; and, therefore, the first ten years that Fletcher spent at Madeley were unmarked by stirring incidents, such as were perpetually occurring in the lives of his friends Wesley and Whitefield.

Madeley is a market town in the county of Salop. It is beautifully situated in a winding glen, through which the river Severn flows. In 1800, fifteen years after Fletcher's death, it contained, according to the parliamentary returns, 291 houses, and 4,758 inhabitants. The church is dedicated to St. Michael; and the parish includes Coalbrook Dale and Madeley Wood, noted for their coal mines and their iron-works. Colliers and iron-workers at Madeley, in the days of Fletcher, were quite as ignorant and brutal as they were elsewhere. His mission was a trying one; and its burdensomeness was not lessened by the fact that there was not a single clergyman in the county of Salop who approved of his Methodist doctrines, or sympathized with his Methodist endeavours. Further, he was without parochial experience. He had preached for the Wesleys and for the Countess of Huntingdon; and, on a few rare occasions, he had been permitted to occupy the pulpits of the Established Church; but, notwithstanding the temporary assistance he had rendered to his Madeley predecessor, he had never held a curacy. In parish work he was a novice; but he was not dismayed. A few months before his induction, he had been with Berridge, who, with the exception of Mr. Hicks at

Wrestlingworth, was as much without clerical sympathy and help in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire, as Fletcher himself was now in Salop. Berridge had seen marvellous results of his denounced ministry, and why should not Fletcher see the same? Hence, on January 6, 1761, he wrote as follows to the Countess of Huntingdon:—

"I had a secret expectation to be the instrument of a work in this part of our Church; and I did not despair of being soon a *little Berridge*. Thus warmed with sparks of my own kindling, I looked out to see the rocks broken, and the waters flowing out; but, to the great disappointment of my hopes, I am now forced to look within, and see the need I have of being broken myself. If my being stationed in this howling wilderness is to answer no public end as to the Gospel of Christ, I will not give up the hope that it may answer a private end as to myself, in humbling me under a sense of unprofitableness.

"As to my parish, all that I see in it, hitherto, is nothing but what one may expect from speaking plainly, and with some degree of earnestness; a crying out, 'He is a Methodist—a downright Methodist!' While some of the poorer say, 'Nay, but he speaketh the truth!' Some of the best farmers, and most of the respectable tradesmen, talk about turning me out of my living as a Methodist or a Baptist. My Friday lecture took better than I expected, and I propose to continue it till the congregation desert me. The number of hearers at that time is generally larger than that which my predecessor had on Sunday. The number of communicants is increased from thirty to above a hundred; and a few seem to seek grace in the means. I thank your ladyship for mentioning Mr. Jones as a curate. There is little probability of my ever wanting one. My oath obliges me to residence, and, when I am here, I can easily manage all the business, and only wait for opportunities of oftener bearing witness to the truth."[1]

Fletcher's troubles were various. He was dissatisfied with himself; a visionary convert caused him anxiety; and many of his parishioners maligned him. Writing to Charles Wesley on March 10, 1761, he remarked:—

"I feel more and more that I neither *abide* in Christ, nor Christ in me; nevertheless, I do not *so* feel it, as to seek Him without intermission. '*Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from*' this heart of unbelief? Blessed be God, who has promised me this deliverance, through our Lord Jesus Christ!

"My new convert has, with great difficulty, escaped the wiles of the devil; who, by fifty visions, had set her on the pinnacle of the temple. Thanks be to God, she has come down without being cast headlong.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 240.

I have had more trouble with her visions than with her unbelief. Two other persons profess that they have received the consolations of Divine love: I wait for their *fruits*.

"A few days ago, I was violently tempted to quit Madeley. The spirit of Jonah had so seized upon my heart that I had the insolence to murmur against the Lord; but the storm is now happily calmed, at least for a season. Alas! what stubbornness there is in the will of man; and with what strength does it combat the will of God under the *mask of piety*, when it can no longer do so with the uncovered, shameless face of vice! '*If a man bridleth not his tongue*,' all his *outward* '*religion is vain*.' May we not add to this, if a man bridleth not his will, which is the language of his desires, his *inward religion is vain* also? The Lord does not, however, leave me altogether; and I have often a secret hope that He will one day touch my heart and lips with a live coal from the altar; and that then His word shall consume the stubble, and break to pieces the stone.

"The question, which you mean to repeat at the end of the winter, is, I hope, whether you shall be welcome at Madeley? My answer is, you shall be welcome; for I have already lost almost all my reputation, and the little that remains does not deserve a competition with the pleasure I shall have in seeing you."[1]

Notwithstanding his dejection, and the opposition he had to encounter, Fletcher continued to labour with unflagging diligence. To his Friday night lecture he now added the catechising of children on Sunday afternoons, but relieved himself of the toil of preparing a second Sunday sermon, by reading the sermons of other men. He also began to see a prospect of commencing services at Madeley Wood and at Coalbrook Dale. Hence, in another letter to Charles Wesley he wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *April* 27, 1761.

"When I first came to Madeley, I was greatly mortified and discouraged by the smallness of my congregations; and I thought if some of our friends in London had seen my little company they would have triumphed in their own wisdom. But now, thank God, things are altered in that respect. Last Sunday, I had the pleasure of seeing some in the churchyard who could not get into the church.

"I began a few Sundays ago to preach in the afternoon, after catechising the children; but I do not preach my own sermons. Twice I read a sermon of Archbishop Usher's; and last Sunday one of the Homilies, taking the liberty of making some observations on such passages as confirmed what I had advanced in the morning; and, by this means, I stopped the mouths of many adversaries.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 107.

"I have frequently had a desire to exhort in Madeley Wood and Coalbrook Dale, two villages of my parish; but I have not dared to run before I saw an *open door*. It now, I think, begins to open. Two small Societies of about twenty persons have formed of themselves in those places, although the devil seems determined to overturn all. A young person, the daughter of one of my rich parishioners, has been thrown into despair, so that everybody thought her insane, and, indeed, I thought so too. Judge how our adversaries rejoiced; and, for my part, I was tempted to forsake my ministry, and take to my heels; I never suffered such affliction. Last Saturday, I humbled myself before the Lord on her account, by fasting and prayer; and I hope the Lord heard my prayer. Yesterday, she found herself well enough to come to church.

"You will do well to engage your colliers at Kingswood to pray for their poor brethren at Madeley. May those at Madeley, one day, equal them *in faith*, as they *now do* in that *wickedness*, for which they (the Kingswood colliers) were famous before you went among them.

"Mr. Hill has written me a very obliging letter, to engage me to accompany the elder of my pupils to Switzerland; and if I had any other country than the place where I am, I should, perhaps, have been tempted to go. At present, however, I have no temptation that way, and I have declined the offer as politely as I could."[1]

The case of the young woman just mentioned was to Fletcher a great trial. In a letter written to Lady Huntingdon[2] on the same day as the foregoing letter to Charles Wesley, he states, that, previous to this, reports had been spread that he drove the people mad, and he had borne such scandals "patiently enough," but this "glaring instance," which seemed to confirm the rumours circulated against him, had thrown him into "agonies of soul." To a great extent, Fletcher had yet to learn a lesson which the Wesleys and Whitefield had long ago been taught: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1 Peter iv. 14).

The scandals were continued; and even the pulpit was used in lampooning the Madeley preacher. Hence the following, addressed to Charles Wesley:—

"MADELEY, *August* 19, 1761.

"I know not whether I mentioned to you a sermon preached at the Archdeacon's Visitation. It was almost all levelled at the points which are called the doctrines of Methodism, and, as the preacher is minister of a parish near mine, it is probable he had me in his eye. After the sermon, another clergyman addressed me with an air of triumph, and demanded what answer I could make. As several of my parishioners were present, besides the churchwardens, I thought it my duty to take the matter up; and I have done so by writing a long letter to the preacher, in which I have touched the principal mistakes of his discourse, with as much politeness and freedom as I was able; but I have had no answer. I could have wished for your advice before I sealed my letter; but, as I could not have it, I have been very cautious, entrenching myself behind the ramparts of Scripture, as well as those of our Homilies and Articles.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 109.
[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 241.

"I know not what to say to you of the state of my soul. I daily struggle in the Slough of Despond, and I endeavour every day to climb the Hill Difficulty. I need wisdom, mildness, and courage; and no man has less of them than I.

"As to the state of my parish, the prospect is yet discouraging. New scandals succeed those that wear away; but '*offences must come.*' Happy shall I be if the offence cometh not by me. My churchwardens speak of hindering strangers from coming to the church, and of repelling them from the Lord's table; but on these points I am determined to make head against them. A club of eighty working men, in a neighbouring parish, being offended at their minister, determined to come in procession to my church, and requested me to preach a sermon for them; but I thought proper to decline doing so, and have thereby a little regained the good graces of the minister, at least for a time."[1]

The preacher, at the Archdeacon's visitation, was the Rev. Mr. Prothero;[2] and the "long letter" to him may be found in Fletcher's collected works (vol. viii.), where it fills twenty-eight octavo pages, and is entitled a "Defence of Experimental Religion." It is dated "Madeley, July 25, 1761."

Mr. Prothero's "elegant sermon," as Fletcher terms it, seems to have consisted of two parts: a defence of revealed religion against Deists and Infidels; and a warning against religious superstition and enthusiasm. The first part gave Fletcher "exceeding great satisfaction," and the *design* of the second part was good, for, as Fletcher remarks, "It is the duty of a preacher to keep the sacred truths committed to him, as well from being perverted by enthusiasts, as from being crushed by infidels. Boasting of communion with God, and peculiar favours from heaven, is hurtful to the cause of Christ, when people's lives show them to be actuated by a spirit of delusion; and setting up impulses in the room of repentance, faith, hope, charity, obedience, has done no small mischief in the Church of God."

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 111.

[2] *Methodist Magazine*, 1821, p. 17.

But, while Fletcher praises Mr. Prothero for "the goodness of his design," he passes strictures upon the execution of it. He condemns Mr. Prothero for "representing, in general, that virtue, benevolence, good-nature, and morality, are the *way* to salvation;" and shows, that according "to the Word of God and the teaching of our Church," sinners are saved by the exercise of faith in Christ. He objected to Mr. Prothero's doctrine, that, by nature, and without the assistance of Divine grace, man "has the same power to enter the paths of virtue as to walk across a room." He censured the way in which the preacher discountenanced the doctrine of the necessity of the new birth; and he maintained, at great length, that to "set aside all feelings in religion, and to rank them with unaccountable impulses," is not consistent with the teachings of the Bible, and with the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies of the English Church.

Soon after this, Fletcher was in another trouble. Hence the following letter written to Charles Wesley:—

"MADELEY, *October* 12, 1761.

"MY DEAR SIR,—You have always the goodness to encourage me, and your encouragements are not unseasonable; for discouragements follow one after another with very little intermission. Those which are of an inward nature are sufficiently known to you; but some others are peculiar to myself, especially those I have had for eight days past, during Madeley wake.

"Seeing that I could not suppress these bacchanals, I did all in my power to moderate their madness; but my endeavours have had little or no effect. You cannot well imagine how much the animosity of my parishioners is heightened, and with what boldness it discovers itself against me, because I preached against drunkenness, shows, and bull-baiting. The publicans and maltmen will not forgive me. They think that to preach against drunkenness, and to cut their purse, is the same thing.

"My church begins not to be so well filled as it has been, and I account for it thus: the curiosity of some of my hearers is satisfied, and others are offended by the word; the roads are worse; and if it shall ever please the Lord to pour His Spirit upon us, the time is not yet come.

The people, instead of saying, 'Let us go up to the house of the Lord,' exclaim, 'Why should we go and hear a Methodist?'

"I should lose all patience with my flock if I had not more reason to be satisfied with them than with myself. My own barrenness furnishes me with excuses for theirs; and I wait the time when God shall give seed to the sower and increase to the seed sown. In waiting that time, I learn the meaning of this prayer, 'Thy will be done.'

"Believe me your sincere, though unworthy, friend,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Fletcher's faithful preaching offended the publicans, and, judging of his sermons in general by the following specimens, it is not surprising that his preaching offended others. The extracts are taken from a sermon delivered in the month of December 1761, and first published in the Dublin edition of the *Methodist Magazine* for 1821 (pp. 249-258).[2] The

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 112.

[2] Fletcher seldom wrote his sermons, and more rarely read them. More than one hundred and forty sermons of Wesley's have been published, and at least sixty of Whitefield's; but of Fletcher's, who had much more leisure than either Wesley or Whitefield, only about a dozen. All the rest are mere outlines. The following are copied from Fletcher's MSS., and have not before been published. They may be taken as fair specimens of Fletcher's pulpit preparations and pulpit helps. They are skeletons of two sermons, preached from Matt. xxii. 36-39:—

"I. Why we must love God.
"II. How we must love Him.
"III. What we must do in order to love Him.

He is our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, Sanctifier. He commands us to love Him. Out of His love there is no happiness. Love of God contains all. He loved us first.

"With all our soul, heart, and strength. Above all things. More than our life, wives, children, estate, honour, ourselves.

"Be convinced we do not love Him. Abhor ourselves for our rebellion. Confess, repent, and believe. Keep a sense of our forgiveness. Pray to Him. Praise Him. Walk with Him. Seek but Him. Refuse all comfort unless we feel His love. Keep a constant communion with Him by seeing His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

"How have we fulfilled this great duty? Try yourselves. Pray an hour by yourselves. If you do not love, you hate. What fury to hate all that is good, great, and lovely! What madness to set our love on creatures! It must fall with them. Love God in Christ. Look to Christ. Believe in Christ, to love God. If you do not love Him, you are in your lives in the devil's state. You can no more go to heaven than the devil. Choose which you will love. The world calls. Let us give all for all."

"Love thy *neighbour*. All men; though never so distant in place, different in opinions, interests. Because made by the same hand; partext was, "Thou shalt speak My words to them, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious" (Ezek. ii. 7). After challenging his congregation to assert their innocence, Fletcher proceeded :—

> "Supposing you never allowed yourself to dishonour the name of God by customary swearing, or grossly to violate His Sabbaths, or commonly to neglect the solemnities of His public worship ; supposing, again, that you have not injured your neighbours in their lives, their chastity, their character, or their property, either by violence or by fraud ; or that you never scandalously debased your rational nature by that vile intemperance which sinks a man below the worst kind of brutes ; supposing all this, can you pretend that you have not in smaller instances violated the rules of piety, of temperance, and of chastity? Does not your own heart prove you guilty of pride, of passion, of sensuality, of an excessive fondness for the world and its enjoyments ; of murmuring, or at least secretly repining, against God under the strokes of an afflictive Providence; of misspending a great deal of your time; of abusing the gifts of God's bounty to vain, and, in some instances, to pernicious purposes; of mocking Him when you have pretended to engage in His worship, drawing near to Him with your lips while your heart has been far from Him? Does not your conscience condemn you of some one breach of the law at least? and by one breach of it, does not the Holy Ghost bear witness (James ii. 10) that you are become guilty of all, and are as incapable of being justified before God by any obedience of your own, as if you had committed ten thousand offences? But, in reality, there are ten thousand and more to be charged to your account. When you come to reflect on all your sins of negligence, as well as on your voluntary transgressions ; on all the instances in which you have failed to do good when it was in your power to do it ; on all the instances in which acts of devotion have been omitted, especially in secret ; and on all those cases in which you have shown a stupid disregard to the honour of God, and to the temporal and eternal happiness of your fellow-creatures ; when all these, I say, are reviewed, the number will swell beyond all possibility of account, and force you to cry out, 'I am rebellious, most rebellious; mine iniquities are more than the hairs of my head!' They will appear

---

takers of the same nature; bought with the same blood; capable of the same happiness.

"As *ourselves*. Not judging ; not thinking evil ; not speaking evil; not defrauding ; not coveting ; doing them good ; praying for them; honouring them

"Because all made in image of God. None but in something better than ourselves ; none but is a child of God, or may become so.

"Put the best construction on words or actions, much more upon thoughts. Relieve necessities. This is imitating God. What we give is lent to God.

"Love universally, constantly, impartially, sincerely ; from a sense of Christ's love."

in such a light before you that your own heart will charge you with countless multitudes; and how much more then that God, 'who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things'?"

This was plain speaking, but very characteristic of the preaching of the Church of England Methodists. Space will permit only one other extract from this sermon.

"And now, sinner, think seriously with yourself what defence you will make to all this? Will you fly in the face of God and that of your conscience so openly as to deny one of the charges of rebellion, yea, of aggravated rebellion, I have advanced against you? Have you not lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven? Have you not sided with His sworn enemies—the world and the flesh? What part of your body, what faculty of your soul, have you not employed as an instrument of unrighteousness? When did you live one day before God with the dependence of a creature, the gratitude of a redeemed creature, the heavenly frame of a sanctified creature? Nay, when did you live one hour without violating God's known law, either in word, or thought, or action? Have not you done it almost continually by the vanity of your mind and the hardness of your heart, if not by the open immorality of your life? And, what infinitely aggravates your guilt, have you not despised and abused God's numberless mercies? Have you not affronted conscience, His deputy in your breast? Have you not resisted and grieved His Spirit? Yea, have you not trifled with Him in all your pretended submissions or solemn engagements? Thousands are, no doubt, already in hell whose guilt never equalled yours; and yet God has spared you to see almost the end of another year, and to hear now this plain representation of your case. And will you not yet consider? Shall nothing move you to shake off that amazing carelessness and stupid disregard of your salvation? Will you never begin to 'work it out with fear and trembling'? Will you slumber in impenitency till eternal woes crush you into destruction? Is death, is judgment, is the bottomless pit so distant that you dare put off from week to week the day of your conversion? You have read in God's Word that there is mercy with Him that He may be feared; but where did you read that there is mercy with Him for those who fear Him not? Show me such a place; I shall not say anywhere in the Bible, but in any book written by a moral heathen. And yet you hope you can be saved in this way.

"Sinner, despise me *here* if thou wilt; call me *here* an enthusiast, and laugh at the concern I feel for thy perishing soul; but *hereafter* thou wilt do me justice, clear me before the Lord Jesus, and acknowledge that thy blood is upon thine own head, that thou art undone because thou wouldst be undone, because thou wouldst take neither warning nor reproof."

To give the reader a further idea of the faithfulness and searching character of Fletcher's preaching at this early period of his Madeley ministry, the subjoined extracts are given from sermons preached during the first three months of 1762.

In January, 1762,[1] he delivered a discourse upon the words, "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life;" in which he described "four classes of sinners who will not come to Christ that they might have life;" and proved "that unbelief, or not coming to Christ for life, is the most abominable and damning of all sins." One brief extract on the latter point must suffice:—

> "Unbelief is a sin of so deep a dye that the devils in hell cannot commit the like. Our Saviour never prayed, wept, bled, and died for devils. He never said to them, 'Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.' They can never be so madly ungrateful as to slight a Saviour. Mercy never wooed their stubborn, proud hearts as it does ours. They have abused grace, it is true, but they never trampled mercy underfoot. This more than diabolical sin is reserved for thee, careless sinner. Now thou hearest Christ compassionately say in the text, 'Ye will not come unto Me,' and thou remainest unmoved; but the time cometh when Jesus, who meekly entreats, shall sternly curse; when He who in tender patience says, 'Ye will not come unto Me,' shall thunder in righteous vengeance, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed; depart unto the second death,—the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' In vain wilt thou plead then as thou dost now, 'Lord, I am no adulterer; I am no extortioner; I used to eat at Thy table; I was baptized in Thy name; I was a true churchman; there are many worse than I am.' This will not admit thee into the kingdom of Christ. His answer will be, 'I know you not; you never came to Me for life.'"

Plain preaching such as this was not likely to please the easy-going Pharisees of the age in which Fletcher lived, any more than it is likely to be popular among the same class of people at the present day. To utter such truths required courage then; and it requires courage now. Fletcher, one of the gentlest of human beings, possessed this courage.

No doubt there were many occasions when his sermons were full of the richest comfort to those who had truly repented, and unfeignedly believed Christ's holy Gospel; but he never failed faithfully to fulfil an Old Testament commission, binding upon the ministers of God throughout all time: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. lviii. 1).

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1821, p. 651.

At the risk of wearying the reader, further extracts must be given, exemplifying Fletcher's fearless fidelity.

On January 4, 1762, England declared war against Spain; and, a few days after, proclamations were issued for a general fast to be observed in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, in the month of March.[1] Fletcher, as a loyal Churchman, preached on this occasion;[2] his text was Ezek. xxxiii. 7-9. After a few preliminary remarks respecting the king's "pious proclamation," he proceeds to say,—

> "We must attack, unmask, and overthrow vice with holy violence, and strike at the heart of sin with the boldness of John the Baptist, and in the spirit of Elijah. Without any apology for my plainness, I shall endeavour to convince the wicked man both of his wickedness and danger."

Fletcher begins with "practical atheists"

> "Thousands there are, who, by gross ignorance, shameful neglect of instruction, and abominable contempt of godliness, are in the front of the battle, and next to the prince of darkness. Their heart is darkened by the mists of pride and the clouds of presumption, and they are such utter strangers to their want of spiritual light and divine grace, that they seldom or never call upon God for help with any solemnity. The unhappy heathenish families who are of that stamp meet regularly every day to eat, drink, and make provision for the flesh; but how seldom do they meet to read and pray. You will find almost as much godliness among the wild Indians as among these practical atheists. But why should I call them *atheists*? They have many gods. The world is their god; pleasure is their god; vanity is their god; money is their god; their belly is their god; to some or other of these idols, they sacrifice their hearts and their time. As for the God of heaven, the great and eternal Jehovah, they put Him off with a careless attendance on His public worship on Sunday morning, if the weather suits them; and it is well if to this they add sometimes the babbling over of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, which, after all, in the manner in which they do it, is no better than a solemn mockery of the Saviour, whom they constantly crucify afresh. Do you belong to such a heathenish, prayerless family? If you do, suffer me to deliver my soul by telling you, that you are the very first person to whom I am bound to say, 'Thou shalt surely die.' Read your sentence in Psalm lxxix. 6. What! shall the indignation of the Lord fall upon prayerless families among

---

[1] *London Magazine*, 1762, p. 48.
[2] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1822, p. 153.

the heathen, and shall it pass by the nominally Christian, but prayerless family to which you belong? No, no; the Judge of all the earth will do right; He will repay you to your face."

"The wicked is often known, to others and to himself, by his injustice, oppression, cruelty, deceit, and unfair dealing. Did you ever make a prey of the poor and helpless? Are you like the horse-leech, crying, 'Give, give,' still wanting more profit, and never thinking you have enough? Do you take more care to lay up treasures on earth than in heaven? Have you got the unhappy secret of distilling silver out of the poor man's brow, and gold out of the tears of helpless widows and friendless orphans? Or, which is rather worse, do you, directly or indirectly, live by poisoning others, by encouraging the immoderate use of those refreshments, which, taken to excess, disorder the reason, ruin the soul, and prove no better than slow poison to the body? If your business calls you to buy or sell, do you use falsehood? do you equivocate? do you exaggerate or conceal the truth, in order to impose upon your neighbour, and make a profit of his necessity or credulity? If any of these marks be upon you, God's word singles you out, and drags you to the bar of Divine justice to hear your doom in the text, 'The wicked shall surely die.' O, see your danger; repent, and make restitution! Why should you meet the unjust steward in hell, when you may yet follow Zaccheus into heaven?"

"There is another fearful sin, which has in it no profit, no pleasure, no, not sensual sweetness enough to bait the hook of temptation. The only enticement to it is the diabolical disposition of the wicked man, and the horrid pride he takes in *cutting a figure* among the children of Belial. I speak of oaths and curses,—those arrows shot from the string of a hellish heart, and the bow of a Luciferian tongue, against heaven itself; these are some of the sparks of hell-fire, which, now and then, come out of the throat of a wicked man. Do they ever come out of thine? A year ago, I laid before you the horror of that sin, and besought you to leave it to Satan and his angels, and to act no more the part of an *incarnate devil.* Have you strictly complied with that request? Has not heaven been pierced with another fiery dart? Have not good men, or good angels (if any attend you still) shuddered at those imprecations, which you have used, perhaps without remorse?"

"But, perhaps, your conscience bears you witness that you are not a swearing Christian, or rather a swearing infidel. Well; but are you clear in the point of adultery, fornication, or uncleanness? Does not the guilt of some vile sin, which you have wickedly indulged in time past, and perhaps are still indulging, mark you for the member of a harlot, and not the member of Christ? Do you not kindle the wrath of heaven against yourself and your country, as the men and women of Gomorrah did against themselves and the other cities of the plain? If you cherish the sparks of wantonness, as they did, how can you but be made with them to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? Do not flatter yourselves with the vain hope, that your sin is not so heinous as theirs. If it be less in degree, is it not infinitely greater in its aggravating circumstances? Were these poor Canaanites *Christians*? Had they Bibles and ministers? Had they sermons and sacraments? Did they ever vow, as you have done, to renounce the devil, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh? Did they ever hear of the Son of God sweating great drops of blood, in an agony of prayer, to quench the fire of human corruption? O acknowledge your guilt and danger, and, by deep repentance, prevent infallible destruction.

"I cannot pass in silence the detestable, though fashionable, sin, which has brought down the curse of heaven, and poured desolation and ruin upon the most flourishing kingdoms,—I mean pride in apparel. Even in this place, where poverty, hard labour, and drudgery would, one should think, prevent a sin which Christianity cannot tolerate even in kings' houses, there are not wanting foolish virgins, who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and betray the levity of their hearts by that of their dress. Yea, some women, who should be mothers in Israel, and adorn themselves with good works as holy and godly matrons, openly affect the opposite character. You may see them offer themselves first to the idol of vanity, and then sacrifice their children upon the same altar. As some sons of Belial teach their little ones to curse, before they can well speak, so these daughters of Jezebel drag their unhappy offspring, before they can walk, to the haunts of vanity and pride. They complain of evening lectures, but run to midnight dancings. O that such persons would let the prophet's words sink into their frothy minds, and fasten upon their careless hearts: 'Because the daughters of Sion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, the Lord will smite with a sore the crown of their head, and discover their shame: instead of well-set hair, there shall be baldness, and burning instead of beauty.'"

These abbreviated extracts of Fletcher's descriptions of "the wicked" are followed by his *directions* to humble themselves before Almighty God; to confess their sins with deep sorrow, and to return to the Lord with prayer and fasting; to meditate on the universality, commonness, and boldness of the nation's wickedness; to begin a visible and thorough reformation; and to seek personal salvation in Christ. The bold preacher cries:—

"From the gilded palace to the thatched cottage, our guilt calls for vengeance. Wickedness is become so fashionable, that he who refuses to run with others into vanity, intemperance, or profaneness, is in danger of losing his character, on one hand; while, on the other, the son of Belial prides himself in excesses, glories in diabolical practices, and scoffs with impunity at religion and virtue. O England! England! happy, yet ungrateful island! Dost thou repay fruitfulness by profaneness,—plenty by vanity,—liberty by impiety,—and the light of Christianity by excesses of immorality?

"As you regard the prosperity of the king, the good of our Church, and the welfare of our country;—as you would not bring a private curse upon yourself, your house, and your dearest friends;—as you value the honour of Almighty God, and dread His awakened wrath;—as you would not force Him to make our land a field of blood, or to break the staff of our bread, and send famine, pestilence, popery, or some other fearful judgment among us;—I pray you, I beseech, I entreat each of you, my dear brethren! as upon my bended knees,—in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by those bowels of Divine mercy against which we have madly kicked in times past, and which, nevertheless, still yearn over us,—I entreat you not to rest in outward humiliation and reformation. Christians must go one step beyond the Ninevites. O seek then, with all true Christians, a righteousness superior to that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Seek it in Christ. Never rest, till you are sure of your interest in Him; till you feel the virtue of His blood applied to your hearts by the power of His Spirit. Without this, all the rest will stand you in little stead."[1]

This, in truth, was thunder and lightning preaching,—no doubt greatly needed then, as, indeed, it is greatly needed now; preaching likely to give offence, but the faithfulness of which God always honours, and crowns with marked success. It raised up against Fletcher bitter enemies; but it was the means of converting not a few of his godless parishioners.

One of these was Mary Matthews, who, listening to the reproaches cast upon Fletcher, was greatly prejudiced against him. At length, she went to hear him. Mary thought herself very good, but Fletcher showed she was very vile. For two years, she was an earnest penitent, and then, by faith in Christ, found peace with God. Mary was brought before magistrates for opening her little house, in Madeley Wood, for preaching, but she continued faithful; and, in 1788, passed away to heaven, her last words being, "I am almost at home. Farewell! God bless you! God for ever bless you!"

Another was Mary Barnard, who lived to the age of ninety, was very lame, but always crawled to Madeley church when the weather would permit. Totally without education herself, she had a son who became a Methodist local preacher. Her death occurred in 1797, and her last message to Fletcher's widow was,—"The covenant is signed and sealed between my Lord and me. I am His by a marriage bond; and He is mine. And now I set to my seal, that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin."[1]

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1822, p. 222.

Such conversions were among Fletcher's encouragements; and he greatly needed them. His preaching saved some, but offended others. In one of his unpublished manuscripts, dated "Madeley, February 28, 1762," he notes a somewhat remarkable occurrence:—

"Last Sunday, only one objection was made against the doctrine I preached in this church, and that, I think, was a poor one, as it was supported by no argument and no Scripture. The sum of it was this, 'It is hard to say that one breach of the law brings a man under the curse, and exposes one out of Christ to the damnation of hell.' To this I answer by four arguments.

"The first is taken from matters of fact in the Word of God. By one sin, and by the offence of one, condemnation came upon all men, namely by the one sin of Adam's eating the forbidden fruit. And a more awful example you have in the sudden destruction of Ananias and Sapphira his wife *for having told one single lie.*

"The second argument is taken from common sense, which tells us that one leak in a ship unstopped will sink it in time, as certainly as a hundred; one piece broken out of a glass makes it a useless glass, as much as if it was dashed into twenty pieces; one stab of a dagger through the heart kills a man as much as a hundred would. And so one sin uncancelled by Christ's blood will as surely destroy an unconverted man as a hundred, though his destruction will not be so terrible as that of him who has committed a hundred.

"The third argument is taken from the exactness of human laws and the practice of earthly judges. They all condemn a man for one single offence. If one can be proved it is enough. Let a murderer kill one man, he is to be hanged as well as if he had killed a hundred. Let a highwayman take one pound from one single person, the law condemns him for a felon, and sends him to the gallows, as well as if he had taken a thousand pounds from a thousand different travellers. The law of the land, to the breach of which the penalty is annexed, is as effectually broken by one act of felony as by a hundred; and the law of God is as much, though not so heinously, broken, by one sin as by a hundred: consequently the law of God curses and damns for one sin as well as for a hundred.

"The fourth argument is taken from Deuteronomy xxvii. 26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.' Also, Galatians iii. 10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' And James ii. 10,

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1800, pp. 219—223.

'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' He violates the law, despises the law, incurs the punishment threatened."

Passing by Fletcher's arguments and logic, this fugitive manuscript is of some importance, as intimating not only that objections were made to Fletcher's doctrines, but also that he was accustomed publicly to notice and answer them in his parish church.

Fletcher had other troubles besides those arising from objections to his teaching. In his Fast-day sermon, preached on March 12, 1762, he had cried :—

"'Because of swearing the land mourneth.' If the prophet of old had lived in our degenerate days, he would have added, 'Because of perjury the land groaneth.' To go no farther than the place we inhabit, how many of us, who have been entrusted with public offices, have wilfully broken the oaths administered unto us? How many open and notorious drunkards, fighters, sabbath-breakers, blasphemers of God's Word, and cursers of men, have escaped deserved censure, I shall not say by the accidental neglect, but by the downright perjury of officers?"

This bold accusation stimulated one of Fletcher's young parishioners to put the law in force against one of the culpable parish officers; by which act the young man brought himself into trouble, and also Fletcher, who protected him.

Further, in the small house of Mary Matthews, built upon the rock in Madeley Wood, Fletcher had begun to hold preaching services; the congregation assembling there had been called "the Rock Church;" and Mary Matthews had been fined £20 for permitting such assemblies in her humble dwelling. Fletcher refers to these incidents in the following letter to Charles Wesley :—

"MADELEY, *May* 16, 1762.

"Since my last, our troubles have increased. A young man having put in force the Act, for suppressing swearing, against a parish officer, he stirred up all the other half gentlemen to remove him from the parish. Here I interposed, and, to do so with effect, I took the young man into my service. By God's grace, I have been enabled to conduct myself, in this matter, so as to give them no handle against me; and, in spite of all their cabals, I have got the better of them.

"What has greatly encouraged them is the behaviour of a magistrate, who was at the first inclined to favour me, but afterwards turned against me with peculiar malevolence, and proceeded so far as to threaten me and all my flock of the Rock Church with imprisonment. Hitherto, the Lord has stood by me, and my little difficulties are nothing to me; but I fear I support them rather like a philosopher than a Christian. We were to have been mobbed with a drum last Tuesday, at the Rock Church; but their captain, a papist, behaved himself so very ill, that they were ashamed of him, and are made peaceable for the present."[1]

Fletcher wrote to this persecuting papist the following letter, which is now for the first time published:—

"SIR,—The indecent and profane manner in which you broke upon those of my parishioners who came to me for private exhortations at Mrs. Matthews', lays me under an absolute obligation to present you at Ludlow Court as a person notoriously guilty—1, Of drunkenness; 2, of cursing; 3, of disturbing me in the discharge of the private labours of my ministry; 4, of profane disregard to the Liturgy of the Established Church; 5, of want of respect for the Royal Family, openly intimated in indecent interruption while I prayed for them, and obliging me to get up from my knees and make you go out of the room before I could conclude the collect in peace; and 6, of cursing, and making game of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

"Though I told you upon the spot, that you should be informed of for your profane behaviour, I think it my duty to acquaint you of it more particularly, that you may prepare your answers to the above mentioned charges.

"I assure you, Sir, that malice, or any private pique, is entirely out of the question. I heartily wish you well, and am ready to do you any service but that of sacrificing the interests of religion and virtue to open profaneness and immorality.

"The following considerations weigh much with me to make me insist on the churchwardens putting you in their presentment; and they will, I hope, convince you that I act only according to the dictates of Christian prudence.

"1. Most of the things laid to your charge were grown into habit before they broke out in my presence. It is not the first time that you have been seen in liquor, and been heard to use profane expressions, and to make sport of the things of God, and turn my labours into ridicule.

"2. So public an offence absolutely demands a public punishment, and the officers, whom I have informed of your behaviour, must be perjured if they present you not, and an irreparable blow will be given to the honour of religion and morality.

"3. The regard I have for our Church, and the peace of the parish, obliges me to resist in you the persecuting spirit of opposition your Church is so noted for.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 114.

"4. Part of my business here as a clergyman of the Church of England is to withstand the propagation of your dangerous principles, and to oppose the increase of the blind persecuting zeal which some seem to breathe after you. If you are suffered openly to excite that profane zeal with impunity, how will your misled companions be confirmed in their errors. If you, who have so many laws to curb you, can offend with impunity, how daring will others grow in wickedness.

"5. A person of note in the parish has lately undergone the severity of the law for part of the above-mentioned charges. What intolerable partiality would it be in the officers and me to take no notice of you who are guilty of the whole.

"Lastly. If I do not get you presented, I shall for ever deprive myself of the liberty of repressing profaneness, immorality, and persecution in my parish. Every drunkard, every swearer, every railer, etc., etc., will (and not without reason) say to me, 'You could spare Mr. Haughton, who was notoriously guilty of our errors; why should you be stricter with Protestants than with Papists?'

"I flatter myself that these reasons will convince you that I am led by Christian prudence and a calm resolution to oppose triumphing profaneness, and not at all by any private views or uncharitable motives. And, wishing that, if you are convicted, the course of human laws may lead you to the harbour of temperance and piety,

"I remain, Sir, your humble and obedient servant,

"J. FLETCHER."

Of course, opinions differ as to the expediency of trying to make men moral by Acts of Parliament; but there can be no doubt of Fletcher's Christian sincerity in the action he took against Mr. Haughton. His effort, however, was a failure. Writing to Charles Wesley, in the month of July, 1762, he said:—

"Your letter arrived some days too late, to prevent my taking a false step respecting the papist in question. Three weeks ago, I went to Ludlow to the Bishop's visitation, and I thought the occasion favourable for my purpose; but the churchwardens, when we were on the spot, refused to support me, and the court has paid no regard to my presentation. Thus I have gained some experience, though at my own cost. The sermon did not touch the string with which I was whipped at the last visitation; and I afterwards had the boldness to go and dine with the Bishop.

"Many of my parishioners are strangely disconcerted at my bringing my gown back from Ludlow. With respect to the magistrate I mentioned to you in my last, because he acted as judge of the circuit two years ago, he now believes himself as able a lawyer as Judge Foster; but, for the present, he contents himself with threatenings. I met him the other day, and, after he had called me Jesuit, etc., and menaced me with his cane, he assured me that he would soon put down our assemblies. How ridiculous is this impotent rage!

"I have attempted to form a Society, and, in spite of much opposition and many difficulties, I hope to succeed. I preach, I exhort, I pray; but, as yet, I seem to have cast the net on the wrong side of the ship. Lord Jesus, come Thyself, and furnish me with a Divine commission!

"For some months past, I have laboured under an insuperable drowsiness: I could sleep day and night; and the hours which I ought to employ with Christ on the mount, I spend like Peter in the garden."[1]

Poor Fletcher's troubles continued and increased. A month later, he wrote again to Charles Wesley, as follows:—

"I have still trials of all sorts. First, spiritual ones. My heart is hard; I have not that contrition, that filial fear, that sweet, humble melting of heart before the Lord, which I consider essential to Christianity.

"Secondly, the opposition made to my ministry increases. A young clergyman, who lives in Madeley Wood, where he has great influence, has openly declared war against me, by pasting on the church door a paper, in which he charges me with rebellion, schism, and being a disturber of the public peace. He puts himself at the head of the gentlemen of the parish (as they term themselves), and, supported by the Recorder of Wenlock, he is determined to put in force the Conventicle Act against me. A few weeks ago, the widow who lives in the Rock Church, and a young man, who read and prayed in my absence, were taken up. I attended them before the magistrate, and the young clergyman with his troop were present. They called me Jesuit, etc.; and the magistrate tried to frighten me, by saying that he would put the Act in force, though we should assemble only in my own house. I pleaded my cause as well as I could; but, seeing he was determined to hear no reason, I told him he must do as he pleased, and that, if the Act in question concerned us, we were ready to suffer all its rigours. In his rage, he went the next day to Wenlock, and proposed to grant a warrant to have me apprehended; but, as the other magistrates were of opinion that the business did not come under their cognizance, but belonged to the Spiritual Court, he was obliged to swallow his spittle alone.

"Mr. Madan,[2] whom I have consulted, tells me the Act may be enforced against the mistress of the house, the young man, and all who were present. The churchwardens talk of putting me in the Spiritual Court for meeting in houses, etc.; but what is worst of all, three false witnesses offer to prove upon oath that I am a liar; and some of *my followers* (as they are called) have dishonoured their profession, to the great joy of our adversaries.

"In the midst of these difficulties I have reason to bless the Lord, that my heart is not troubled. Forget me not in your prayers."[3]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 115.

[2] The Rev. Martin Madan, who, before he became a clergyman, was a barrister-at-law.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 117.

All this braggart persecution seems to have ended in threats. Fletcher wrote again to Charles Wesley, on November 22, 1762:—

"The debates about the illegality of exhorting in houses (although only in my own parish) grew some time ago to such a height, that I was obliged to lay my reasons before the Bishop; but his lordship very prudently sends me no answer. I think he knows not how to disapprove, and yet dares not approve this methodistical way of procedure."[1]

Such is a bird's-eye view of Fletcher's ministry and ministerial trials during the first two years after his appointment to the living of Madeley in 1760. As an earnest evangelical clergyman of the Church of England, he almost stood alone. Shropshire had produced one like-minded minister; but he, the Rev. Mr. Hatton, was now in the Isle of Man. To this gentleman, Fletcher, in his solitude, wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *August* 4, 1762.

"REV. SIR,—There are so few of our profession in this county who are not ashamed of the cross of Christ, and of the Homilies and Articles of our Church, that it gave me no small pleasure to hear you are not led away with the generality into dry empty notions of morality and formality,—the two legs on which fashionable religion stalks through this so-called Christian land. May the Lord Jesus convince us daily more and more, by His Spirit, of sin in ourselves, and of righteousness in Him! May we, in the strength of our dying Samson, pull down the buildings of self-righteousness, though the consequence should be to see all our hopes of preferment and esteem buried in the ruins! May we never be led to preach another Gospel than that of Christ! 'He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned' (Mark xvi. 16).

"I hope, Sir, you will not be discouraged. Regard not the wind, but sow your seed early and late; and the Lord of the harvest will give the increase, as seemeth best to His heavenly wisdom. I meet with many trials in my parish, but our faithful Lord opens always a door for me to escape; and so He will for you.

"I should be thankful to Providence, if your way should be made plain into this neighbourhood. You owe yourself to Shropshire in particular; and no county needs hands for the spiritual harvest more than this does. I pray that the Lord of the harvest may thrust you among us.

"I bespeak a sermon when you come to Salop; trusting that you will not be ashamed to bear witness to the truth as it is in Jesus, from so despised a pulpit as that of, dear Sir, your affectionate and weak fellow servant in the Gospel,

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 124.

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Fletcher longed for clerical sympathy and co-operation; but he had to wait for them. In all respects his position was a trying one. The Rev. Mr. Gilpin, who afterwards was well acquainted with him, writes:—

"Celebrated for the extensive ironworks carried on within its limits, Madeley was remarkable for little else than the ignorance and profaneness of its inhabitants, among whom respect to man was as rarely to be observed as piety towards God. In this benighted place, the Sabbath was openly profaned, and the most holy things contemptuously trampled under foot; even the restraints of decency were violently broken through, and the external form of religion held up as a subject of ridicule.

"Immediately upon his settling in this populous village, Mr. Fletcher entered upon the duties of his vocation with an extraordinary degree of earnestness and zeal. He saw the difficulties of his situation, and the reproaches to which he should be exposed by a conscientious discharge of the pastoral office; but, as a steward of the manifold grace of God, he faithfully dispensed the word of life, according as every man had need; instructing the ignorant, reasoning with gainsayers, exhorting the immoral, and rebuking the obstinate. Not content with discharging the stated duties of the Sabbath, he counted every day as lost in which he was not actually employed in the service of the Church. As often as a small congregation could be collected, he joyfully proclaimed to them the acceptable year of the Lord, whether it were in the church, in a private house, or in the open air."

"It was a common thing, in his parish, for young persons of both sexes to meet together for what was called recreation; and that recreation usually continued from evening to morning, consisting chiefly in dancing, revelling, drunkenness, and obscenity. These licentious assemblies he considered a disgrace to the Christian name, and determined to exert his ministerial authority for their total suppression. Frequently he burst in upon them with a holy indignation, making war upon Satan in places peculiarly appropriated to his service."

"His enemies wrested his words, misrepresented his actions, and cast out his name as evil; but whether he was insulted in his person, or injured in his property; whether he was attacked with open abuse, or pursued by secret calumny, he walked amid the most violent assaults of his enemies, as a man invulnerable; and while his firmness discovered that he was unhurt, his forbearance testified that he was unoffended."

"Had he aimed at celebrity as a public speaker, furnished as he was with the united powers of learning, genius, and taste, he might have succeeded beyond many; but his design was to *convert* and not to *captivate* his hearers; to secure their eternal interests, and not to obtain their momentary applause. Hence his '*speech and his preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*' He spake as in the presence of God, and taught as one having Divine authority. There was an energy in his preaching that was irresistible. His subjects, his language, his gestures, the tone of his voice, and the turn of his countenance, all conspired to fix the attention and affect the heart. Without aiming at sublimity, he was truly sublime; and uncommonly eloquent without affecting the orator."[1]

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1829, p. 175.

Such is the testimony of a gentleman who, for a season, lived in Fletcher's house, and for many years lived in the neighbourhood of Fletcher's parish. It would be worse than foolish to add anything to it, except the remarks of Fletcher's friend and first biographer, John Wesley:—

"Mr. Fletcher settled at Madeley in the year 1760, and from the beginning he was a laborious workman in his Lord's vineyard. At his first settling there, the hearts of several were unaccountably set against him, insomuch that he was constrained to warn some of these that if they did not repent God would speedily cut them off. And the truth of these predictions was shown over and over by the signal accomplishment of them.[2] But no opposition could hinder him from going on his Master's work, and suppressing vice in every possible manner. Those sinners who endeavoured to hide themselves from him he pursued to every corner of his parish by all sorts of means, public and private, early and late, in season and out of season, entreating and warning them to flee from the wrath to come. Some made it an excuse for not attending church that they could not awake early enough to get their families ready. He provided for this also. Taking a bell in his hand, he set out every Sunday at five in the morning, and went round the most distant parts of the parish, inviting all the inhabitants to the house of God.

"Yet, notwithstanding all the pains he took, he saw for some time little fruit of his labour; insomuch that he was more than once in doubt whether he had not mistaken his place; whether God had indeed called him to confine himself to one town, or to labour more at large in His vineyard. He was not free from this doubt when a multitude of people flocked together at a funeral. He seldom let these awful opportunities slip without giving a solemn exhortation. At the close of the exhortation which was then given, one man was so grievously offended that he could not refrain from breaking out into scurrilous, yea, menacing language. But, notwithstanding all his struggling against it, the Word fastened upon his heart. At first, indeed, he roared like a lion; but he soon wept like a child. Not long after, he came to Mr. Fletcher in the most humble manner, asking pardon for his outrageous behaviour, and begging an interest in his prayers. This was such a refreshment as he stood in need of. In a short time, this poor broken-hearted sinner was filled with joy unspeakable. He then spared no pains in exhorting his fellow-sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

---

[1] "The Portrait of St. Paul."

[2] Jonathan Crowther, President of the Methodist Conference in 1819, relates, in his unpublished autobiography, the following anecdote: "Mrs. Fletcher told me that one Sunday, after the forenoon service, Mr. Preston, a gentleman farmer near Madeley, very grossly insulted Mr. Fletcher in the churchyard, and evinced great enmity against his faithful ministry. In his sermon in the afternoon, Mr. Fletcher said, he had a powerful impression that before the next Sabbath God would give a signal mark of His displeasure against the enemies of His cause and truth. The week was drawing to a close; nothing remarkable had happened; but on Saturday night, Mr. Preston, when returning home from market in a state of intoxication, fell from his horse and died on the spot."

"It was not long after, when, one Sunday evening, Mr. Fletcher, after performing the usual duty at Madeley, was about to set out for Madeley Wood, to preach and catechise as usual. But just then notice was brought (which should have been given before) that a child was to be buried. His waiting till the child was brought prevented his going to the wood; and herein the providence of God appeared. For, at this very time, many of the colliers, who neither feared God nor regarded men, were baiting a bull just by the meeting-house; and, having had plenty to drink, they had all agreed, as soon as he came, *to bait the parson*. Part of them were appointed to pull him off his horse, and the rest to set the dogs upon him. One of these very men afterwards confessed that he was with them when this agreement was made; and that afterwards, while they were in the most horrid manner cursing and swearing at their disappointment, a large china punch-bowl, which held above a gallon, without any apparent cause (for it was not touched by any person or thing) fell all to shivers. This so alarmed him that he forsook all his companions, and determined to save his own soul."[1]

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

CHAPTER V.

THREE QUIET, SUCCESSFUL YEARS.

1762—1765.

IN the autumn of 1762 Methodism in London was in perilous confusion. Two years before, Wesley had appointed Thomas Maxfield, one of his first preachers, to meet a select band, who professed to be entirely sanctified. Some of the members of this band soon had dreams, visions and impressions, as they thought, from God; and Maxfield, instead of repressing their whimsies, encouraged them, so that their vagaries were soon regarded as proofs of the highest state of grace. Some of the preachers rebuked these visionaries. This excited resentment, and they refused to hear their rebukers preach. They became the avowed followers of Maxfield, who told them they were not to be taught by man, and especially by those who had less grace than themselves. George Bell, converted in 1758, and sanctified in 1761, joined them, and became wilder than the wildest of them. The result was, when Wesley returned to London in October, 1762, he found the Society there in a disgraceful uproar, and the followers of Maxfield and Bell formed into a sort of detached connexion.[1] They called themselves "the witnesses." Wesley and his brother were in great distress. The latter wrote to Fletcher, and received the following reply:—

"MADELEY, *September* 20, 1762.

"'*Crede quod habes, et habes,*' is not very different from those words of Christ, '*What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*' The humble reason of the believer, and the irrational presumption of the enthusiast, draw this doctrine to the right hand or the left; but to split the hair—here lies the difficulty. I have told you that *I am no party man;* I am neither for nor against the witness for Christian perfection *without examination.* I complain of those who deceive themselves; I honour those who do honour to their profession; and I wish we could find out the right way of reconciling the most profound humility with the most lively hopes of grace. I think you insist on the one and Maxfield on the other; and I believe you both sincere in your views. God bless you both; and if either of you goes too far, may the Lord bring him back!"[1]

---

[1] For a fuller account of this unhappy schism, see Tyerman's "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. ii., pp. 432-444.

"MADELEY, *November* 22, 1762.

"Brother Ley[2] arrived here yesterday, and confirms the melancholy news of many of our brethren overshooting sober and steady Christianity in London. I feel a great deal for you and the Church in these critical circumstances. Oh that I could stand in the gap! Oh that I could, by sacrificing myself, shut this immense abyss of enthusiasm which opens its mouth among us!

"The corruption of the best things is always the worst of corruptions. Going into an extreme of this nature, or only winking at it, will give an eternal sanction to the vile aspersions cast on all sides on the purest doctrines of Christianity; and we shall sadly overthrow, overthrow in the *worst manner*, what we have endeavoured to build for many years.

"I have a particular regard for Maxfield and Bell—both of them are my correspondents. I am strongly prejudiced in favour of the witnesses, and do not willingly receive what is said against them; but allowing that what is reported is one-half mere exaggeration, the tenth part of the rest shows that spiritual pride, presumption, arrogance, stubbornness, party spirit, uncharitableness, prophetic mistakes, in short, *every sinew* of enthusiasm is now at work in many of that body. I do not credit any one's bare word, but I ground my sentiments on Bell's own letters.

"May I presume to lay before you my mite of observation? Would it be wrong in me calmly to sit down, with some unprejudiced friends and lovers of both parties, and to fix with them the marks and symptoms of enthusiasm; and then insist, at first in love, and afterwards, if necessary, with all the weight of my authority, upon those who *have them* or *plead for them*, either to stand to the sober rule of Christianity, or *openly* to depart from us?

"Fear not, dear Sir, the Lord will take care of the ark. Have faith in the Word, and leave the rest to Providence. '*The Lord will provide*' is a comfortable motto for a believer."[3]

Thus by proposing to act as mediator between the Wesleys and their distracted followers in London did Fletcher end the eventful year of 1762. In the middle of the year he told Charles Wesley that he had "attempted to form a Society," and hoped to succeed. He drew up rules for this Society.[1] First of all, he described "the nature of a Religious Society," and quoted Malachi iii. 16, Psalm lxvi. 16; Luke viii. 1-3; Acts i. 15, ii. 42-47; Heb. iii. 12, 13, x. 25; Col. iii. 16; 1 Cor. xiv. 29-31; 1 Thess. v. 11-14; James v. 16; and Jude i. 18-21. "Encouraged by these texts," said he, "a few of us design to unite in a Religious Society to support and animate each other in the ways of godliness." He proceeds:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 121.
[2] One of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers.
[3] Letters, 1791, p. 126.

> "In order to be admitted into the Society, one only condition is previously required, namely, a sincere desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek salvation from the servitude of sin according to the Gospel, and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, especially the ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth, which are earnestly recommended to the perusal of every person who would be a member.
>
> "It is, however, expected that the sincerity of such a desire be evinced by putting on the form of godliness, which we apprehend to consist in three things: 1. Doing no harm, Isa. i. 16; Rom. xii. 9. 2. Doing good, Isa. i. 17; Rom. xii. 9. 3. Using the means of grace, Luke i. 16, Isa. lv. 6."

---

[1] He also drew up the following rules of daily self-examination for himself:—

"1. Did I awake spiritual, and was I watchful in keeping my mind from wandering this morning when I was rising?

"2. Have I this day got nearer to God in times of prayer, or have I given way to a lazy, idle spirit?

"3. Has my faith been weakened by unwatchfulness, or quickened by diligence this day?

"4. Have I this day walked by faith and eyed God in all things?

"5. Have I denied myself in all unkind words and thoughts; have I delighted in seeing others preferred before me?

"6. Have I made the most of my precious time, as far as I had light, strength, and opportunity?

"7. Have I kept the issues of my heart in the means of grace, so as to profit by them?

"8. What have I done this day for the souls and bodies of God's dear saints?

"9. Have I laid out anything to please myself when I might have saved the money for the cause of God?

"10. Have I governed well my tongue this day, remembering that 'in a multitude of words there wanteth not sin'?

"11. In how many instances have I denied myself this day?

"12. Do my life and conversation adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ?"[2]

[2] "Thirteen Original Letters, by the Rev. John Fletcher. Bath: 1791," p. 38.

Under the first of these rules Fletcher mentions "taking the Lord's name in vain, either by profane cursing, swearing, or trivial exclamations;" sabbath-breaking; uncleanness; drunkenness, or tippling, or going into a public house, or staying without necessity; fighting; quarrelling; brawling; railing, uncharitable conversation; filthy talking; jesting; evil speaking; attendance at balls, plays, races, cock-fightings and bull-baitings; gaming; song-singing; reading unprofitable books; softness; needless indulgence; putting on gaudy and costly apparel; smuggling; taking advantage of a neighbour, etc.

Under the second, he includes doing good to the bodies of men; doing good to the souls of men; discountenancing profaneness and immorality; diligence in business; taking up the cross daily, etc.

Under the third, he names, the public worship of God in the church; the ministry of the Word either read or expounded; the Lord's Supper; family prayer; private prayer; Scripture reading; fasting; and singing hymns and psalms.

It is needless to tell *Methodist* readers that Fletcher's *rules* are *substantially* the same as the rules which Wesley drew up and published for the Methodists in 1743, and which, excepting two or three trivial alterations, introduced in 1744, are the same now as they were then. Fletcher, however, attached an "Appendix" to his rules, to the following effect:—

1. That any one practising the Rules "is to give in his or her name to the Director of the Society and the major part of the members; and they shall be joyfully admitted, be they high or low, old or young, learned or unlearned."
2. If any member fell into sin, he must be expelled.
3. If the expelled member wished to be re-admitted, he must acknowledge his error, and if, after a trial of three months, he appeared to be reformed, his re-admission should take place.
4. The members were to meet together one evening every week between seven and eight o'clock.
5. They were to watch over each other in love.
6. They were not to be angry with those who spoke against the Society.

The probability is that Fletcher did not print his Rules, as Wesley had done. Indeed, there was no need for this, as his Societies were few in number, and existed within a comparatively small area. It was an easy thing for Fletcher to read the rules to each Society as occasion required, and, perhaps, they were inscribed in the registers of attendance. Three years after Fletcher's death, the Rev. Melville Horne, his successor at Madeley, printed and published them, and stated, in a Preface, that Fletcher drew them up soon after his settlement at Madeley, and revised and corrected them about the year 1777.

In another production, entitled "Heads of Examination for Adult Christians," Fletcher set up a higher standard than his "Rules" contained. The following is an abridgment of the questions he wished his people to propose to themselves:—

"Do I feel any pride? Am I dead to all desire of praise? If any despise me, do I like them the worse for it? Or if they love and approve me, do I love them more on that account? Is Christ the life of all my affections and designs, as my soul is the life of my body? Have I always the presence of God? Does no cloud come between God and the eye of my faith? Am I saved from the fear of man? Do I speak plainly to all, neither fearing their frowns, nor seeking their favours? Am I always ready to confess Christ, to suffer with His people, and to die for His sake? Do I deny myself at all times, and take up my cross? Am I willing to give up my ease and convenience to oblige others, or do I expect them to conform to my hours, ways, and customs? Are my bodily senses and outward things all sanctified to me? Am I poor in spirit? Have I no false shame in approaching God? Do I not lean to my own understanding? Do I esteem every one better than myself? Do I never take that glory to myself which belongs to Christ? Does meekness bear rule over all my tempers, affections, and desires? Do I possess resignation, seeing God does, and will do, all for my good? Am I temperate, using the world, and not abusing it? Am I courteous, not severe; suiting myself to all with sweetness; striving to give no one pain, but to gain and win all for their good? Am I vigilant, redeeming time, and taking every opportunity of doing good? Do I perform the most servile offices, such as require labour and humiliation, with cheerfulness? Do I love God with all my heart? Do I constantly present myself, my time, my substance, talents, and all I have, a living sacrifice? Is every thought brought into subjection to Christ? Do I love my neighbour as myself? Do I think no evil, listen to no groundless surmises, nor judge from appearances? How am I in my sleep? If Satan presents any evil imagination, does my will immediately resist or give way to it? Do I bear the infirmities of age or sickness without seeking to repair the decays of nature by strong liquors? Or do I make Christ my sole support, casting the burden of a feeble body into the arms of His mercy?"[1]

This was the life Fletcher himself strove to live; and this was the life he urged his Methodists to live.

Fletcher's Methodist Society at *Madeley* was formed as early as the year 1762; and one of its members soon involved him in trouble. Hence the following, taken from a letter addressed to Charles Wesley:—

"MADELEY, *January* 5, 1763.

"As to my parish, we are just where we were. We look for our Pentecost, but we do not pray sufficiently to obtain it. We are left in tolerable quiet by all but the sergeant, who sent a constable to make enquiry concerning the life of His Majesty's subjects, upon information that the cry of murder had been heard in my house on Christmas Day.

"This report originated in the cries of a young woman, who is of our Society, and whom Satan has bound for some months. It seems to me as if that old murderer proposed to ruin the success of my ministry at Madeley, as he did in London, in the French Church, by means of Miss A——d.

"The young woman here emaciates her body by fastings; falls into convulsions, sometimes in the church, and sometimes in our private assemblies; and is perpetually tempted to suicide. Her constitution is considerably weakened, as well as her understanding. What to do in this case I know not; for those who are tempted in this manner pay as little regard to reason as the miserable people in Bedlam. Prayer and fasting are our only resources. We propose to represent her case to the Lord on Tuesday next, and on all the following Tuesdays. Aid the weakness of our prayers with all the power of yours."[2]

This was a greater trial to Fletcher than, at first sight, appears. It seems to have led him to entertain the thought of resigning his living. More than six months afterwards, in another letter to Charles Wesley, he wrote:—

"MADELEY, *July* 26, 1763.

"Everything here is pretty quiet now. Many of our offences die away; though, not long ago, I had trials in abundance. One of them might have made me quit Madeley; but the young person I mentioned as being sorely tempted of the devil, is happily delivered."[3]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 434.
[2] *Ibid*, 1791, p. 127.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 133.

Fletcher's life at Madeley, during the year 1763, seems to have been a quiet one. Maxfield's quarrel with Wesley still continued, and Fletcher took an interest in it. Wesley's annoyance was great, and his forbearance with the London fanatics exposed him to the censure of his friends. John Downes, in a letter to Joseph Cownley, wrote:—

"I consider the follies and extravagance of the witnesses as the devices of Satan, to cast a blemish upon a real work of God. The more I converse with the solid ones, the more I long to experience what they do. It is a state worthy of a Christian. As to the follies of the enthusiasts, Mr. Charles hears every week less or more. He threatens, but cannot find in his heart to put in execution. The consequence is, the talk of all the town, and entertainment for the newspapers."

On February 1, 1763, Charles Wesley wrote:—

"Satan has made sad havoc of the flock. Four years ago, I gave warning of the flood of enthusiasm which has now overflowed us."

A week later John Wesley remarked:—

"The mask is thrown off. George Bell, John Dixon, etc., have quitted the Society. I wrote to Thomas Maxfield, but was not favoured with an answer. This morning I wrote a second time, and received an answer indeed! The substance is, 'You take too much upon you.'"[1]

These brief extracts are given to indicate the great commotion that at this time existed. The excitement was not confined to London. It was shared by Mr. Samuel Hatton and Miss Hatton, both of them Fletcher's friends and correspondents, and who seem to have resided at the ancient town of Wenn, about twenty miles from Madeley.[2] In a letter to Miss Hatton, Fletcher expressed his views, as follows:—

"MADELEY, *March* 14, 1763.

"Mr. Maxfield's reply to Mr. Wesley seems to me just in *some* points, and in *others* too severe. Mr. Wesley is, perhaps, too tenacious of some expressions, and too prone to credit what he wishes concerning some mistaken witnesses of the state of fathers in Christ. Mr. Maxfield, perhaps, esteems too little the inestimable privilege of being perfected in that love which casts out fear. But, in general, I conceive that it would be better for babes, or young men in Christ, to cry for a growth in grace, than to dispute whether fathers in Christ enjoy such privileges."[1]

---

[1] Tyerman's "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. ii., p. 462.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 182.

A few weeks later, in a letter to Mr. Samuel Hatton, Fletcher wrote :—

"MADELEY, *April* 22, 1763.

"I am quite of your opinion about the mischief that some professors do in the Church of Christ under the mask of sanctity; but my Master bids me bear with the tares until the harvest, lest, in rooting them up, I should promiscuously pull up the wheat also. As to Mr. Wesley's system of perfection, it tends rather to promote humility than pride, if I may credit his description of it in the lines following :—

"'Now let me gain perfection's height,
Now let me into *nothing* fall,
Be *less than nothing* in Thy sight,
And feel that Christ is *all in all!*'

"More than this I do not desire, and I hope that, short of this, nothing will satisfy either my dear friend or me."[2]

The following letter, to Charles Wesley, refers to the same disturbance; but it also mentions another matter of great interest. Six years ago, Fletcher had become acquainted with Miss Bosanquet. During the present year, he had commenced a correspondence, in the highest degree religious, with Miss Hatton. He was a lone man, living among colliers. He had lately been with Charles Wesley. Charles was an eminently social man, and had suggested to Fletcher that he would do well to marry. Fletcher replied as follows :—

"MADELEY, *September* 9, 1763.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I see that we ought to learn continually to cast our burdens upon the Lord, who alone can bear them without fatigue and pain. If Maxfield returns, the Lord may correct his errors, and give him so to insist on the fruits of faith as to prevent antinomianism. I believe him sincere; and, though obstinate and suspicious, I am persuaded he has a true desire to know the will and live the life of God. I reply in the same words you quoted to me in one of your letters,—'Don't be afraid of a wreck, for Jesus is in the ship.' After the most violent storm, the Lord will, perhaps, all at once, bring our ship into the desired haven.

"You ask me a very singular question with respect to women; I shall, however, answer it with a smile, as I suppose you asked it. You might have remarked that, for some days before I set off for Madeley, I considered matrimony with a different eye to what I had done; and the person who then presented herself to my imagination was Miss Bosanquet. Her image pursued me for some hours the last day, and that so warmly, that I should, perhaps, have lost my peace if a suspicion of the truth of Juvenal's proverb, '*Veniunt a dote sagittae*,' had not made me blush, fight, and fly to Jesus, who delivered me at the same moment from her image and the idea of marriage. Since that time, I have been more than ever on my guard against admitting the idea of matrimony, sometimes by the consideration of the love of Jesus, which ought to be my whole felicity; and, at others, by the following reflections.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 130.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 132.

"It is true that the Scripture says that a good wife is the gift of the Lord; and it is also true that there may be one in a thousand; but who would put in a lottery where are nine hundred and ninety-nine blanks to one prize? And, suppose I could find this Phœnix, this woman of a thousand, what should I gain by it? A distressing refusal. How could she choose such a man as I? If, notwithstanding all my self-love, I am compelled cordially to despise myself, could I be so wanting in generosity as to expect another to do that for me, which I cannot do for myself—to engage to love, to esteem, and to honour me?

"I will throw on my paper some reflections which the last paragraphs of your letter gave rise to, and I beg you will weigh them with me in the balances of the sanctuary.

"Reasons for and against matrimony.

"1. A tender friendship is, after the love of Christ, the greatest felicity of life; and a happy marriage is nothing but such a friendship between two persons of different sexes.	"1. Death will shortly end all particular friendships. The happier the state of marriage, the more afflicting is the widowhood; besides, we may try a friend and reject him after trial; but we cannot know a wife till it is too late to part with her.
"2. A wife might deliver me from the difficulties of housekeeping, etc.	"2. Marriage brings after it a hundred cares and expenses; children, a family, etc.
"3. Some objections and scandals may be avoided by marriage.	"3. If matrimony is not happy, it is the most fertile source of scandal.
"4. A pious and zealous wife might be as useful as myself; nay, she might be much more so among my female parishioners, who greatly want an inspectress.	"4. I have a thousand to one to fear that a wife, instead of being a help, may be indolent, and consequently useless; or humoursome, haughty, capricious, and consequently a heavy curse.

"Farewell! Yours,
"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 144.

This is a curious letter. Eighteen years after the time when it was written, Fletcher married Miss Bosanquet. Probably the "reasons *for* matrimony" had been, in substance, suggested by Charles Wesley. Fletcher's "reasons *against* matrimony" were undoubtedly sincere, but they were unintentionally selfish, and were unworthy of him. Experience taught him wisdom.

Before proceeding further, a remarkable occurrence must be noted. The church at Madeley is dedicated to St. Michael, whose feast-day is September 29. On that day, in 1763, Fletcher preached from Dan. iii. 14, and concluded his discourse in words like these:—

> "From the dedication of our church, from days set apart to be kept holy, Satan takes occasion to enforce the worship of his threefold image, profit, honour, pleasure. Now remember the duty of God's people, and quit yourselves like men. Some petty Nebuchadnezzars have sent to gather together, not princes, but drunken men; and have set up, not a golden image, no, nor a golden calf, but a living bull.[1] O ye that fear God, be not afraid of their terror; be not allured by their music; confess the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 'No other God can deliver after this sort,' said the heathen; and give me leave to add, 'No other God can punish after this sort.' The burning furnace of His indignation is heated; and eternity is the duration of its torments."[2]

The way in which Fletcher was led to preach this sermon on "the Wake-Sunday" was told by himself, and the story, after his death, was published in a small tract, entitled, "The Furious Butcher Humbled: a true and remarkable story, as related by the late Rev. Mr. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley." The substance of it was also inserted in the *Evangelical Magazine* for the year 1798. From that account, the following is taken.

> "One Sunday," said Mr. Fletcher, "when I had done reading prayers at Madeley, I went up into the pulpit, intending to preach a sermon, which I had prepared for that purpose; but my mind was so confused, that I could not recollect either my text or any part of my sermon. I was afraid I should be obliged to come down without saying anything. But, having recollected myself a little, I thought I would say something on the First Lesson, which was the third chapter of the book of Daniel, containing the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being

---

[1] The reference obviously is to a bull-baiting.

[2] Fletcher's Works, vol. viii., p. 76.

cast into the fiery furnace. I found, in doing this, such extraordinary assistance from God, and such a peculiar enlargement of heart, that I supposed there must be some peculiar cause of it. I therefore desired, if any of the congregation found anything particular, they would acquaint me with it in the ensuing week.

"In consequence of this, the Wednesday after, a woman came and gave me the following account:—

"'I have been for some time much concerned about my soul. I have attended the church at all opportunities, and have spent much time in private prayer. At this, my husband (who is a butcher) has been exceedingly enraged, and has threatened me severely as to what he would do to me if I did not leave off going to John Fletcher's church; yea, if I dared to go again to any religious meetings whatever. When I told him I could not in conscience refrain from going, at least, to the parish church, he became outrageous, and swore dreadfully, and said, if I went again, he would cut my throat as soon as I came back. This made me cry to God that He would support me; and, though I did not feel any great degree of comfort, yet, having a sure confidence in God, I determined to do my duty, and leave the event to Him. Last Sunday, after many struggles with the devil and my own heart, I came downstairs ready for church. My husband said he should not cut my throat, as he had intended, but he would heat the oven, and throw me into it, the moment I came home. Notwithstanding this threat, which he enforced with many bitter oaths, I went to church, praying all the way that God would strengthen me to suffer whatever might befall me. While you were speaking of the three children whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the burning fiery furnace, I found all you said belonged to *me*. God applied every word to my heart; and, when the sermon was ended, I thought, if I had a thousand lives, I could lay them all down for Him. I felt so filled with His love that I hastened home, fully determined to give myself to whatsoever God pleased; nothing doubting that He either would take me to heaven, if He suffered me to be burnt to death; or that He would in some way deliver me, as He did His three servants that trusted in Him. When I got to my own door, I saw flames issuing from the oven, and I expected to be thrown into it immediately. I felt my heart rejoice, that, if it were so, the will of the Lord would be done. I opened the door, and, to my utter astonishment, saw my husband upon his knees, praying for the forgiveness of his sins. He caught me in his arms; earnestly begged my pardon; and has continued diligently seeking God ever since.'"

Such was the poor woman's story. After listening to it, Fletcher cried, "Now I know why my sermon was taken from me, namely, that God might thus magnify His mercy."

Nothing need be added, except that to attribute these strange occurrences to anything less than the direct interference of Him who has supreme authority over all human minds and hearts would be infidelity of the most impious kind.

Nothing is known of Fletcher's life during the year 1764. It is a singular fact, that only three of his letters, belonging to this period, have been published, and these were all addressed to his friend, at Wem, Miss Hatton. They are entirely devoid of incident; but are full of piety. The following are extracts:—

"Madeley, March 5, 1764. Your dulness in private prayer arises from the want of familiar friendship with Jesus. To obviate it, go to your closet, as if you were going to meet your dearest friend; cast yourself at His feet; bemoan your coldness; extol His love to you; and let your heart break with a desire to love Him. Get *recollection*,—a dwelling within ourselves,—a being abstracted from the creature, and turned towards God. For want of such a frame, our times of prayer are frequently dry and useless; imagination prevails, and the heart wanders; whereas we pass easily from recollection to delightful prayer."[1]

"Madeley, September 3, 1764. With respect to the hindrances your worldly business lays in your way, the following means, in due subordination to faith in Jesus, may be of service to you:—

"1. Get up early and save time, before you go to business, to put on the *whole armour of God*, by close meditation and earnest prayer.

"2. Consider the temptation that most easily besets you, whether it be hurry, or vanity, or lightness, or want of recollection to do what you do as unto God.

"3. When your mind has been drawn aside, do not fret, or let yourself go down the stream of nature, as if it were vain to attempt to swim against it; but confess your fault, and calmly resume your former endeavour, but with more humility and watchfulness.

"4. Steal from business now and then, though for two or three minutes only, and, in the corner where you can be least observed, pour out your soul in confession; or utter a short ejaculation for power to watch, and to believe that Jesus can keep you watching."[2]

"Madeley, *December*, 1764. I am sensible how I want advice in a thousand particulars, and how incapable I am to direct anyone; but the following observations came to my mind on the reading of your letter, and I venture to send them.

"You cannot expect to attain to such a carriage as will please all you converse with. The Son of God, the *original* of all human perfection, was blamed, sometimes for His silence, and sometimes for His speaking; and shall the handmaid be above her Master?

"There is no sin in wearing such things as you have by you, if they are necessary for *your station*, and characterize your *rank*.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 147.
[2] *Ibid*, 1791, p. 151.

"There is no sin in *looking cheerful.* '*Rejoice evermore:*' and, if it is our duty always to be *filled with joy*, it is our duty to *appear* what we are in reality. I hope, however, your friends know how to distinguish between *cheerfulness* and *levity.*

"Beware of stiff singularity in things *barely indifferent:* it is *self* in disguise; and it is so much the more dangerous when it comes recommended by a serious, self-denying, religious appearance.

"I hope the short-comings of some about you will not prevent you eyeing the prize of a glorious conformity to our blessed Head. It is to be feared that not a few of those who profess to have attained it, have mistaken the way. They are still *something;* whereas I apprehend that an important step towards that conformity is to become *nothing;* or rather, with St. Paul,—to become in our own eyes the *chief of sinners*, and the *least of saints.*"[1]

These fragmentary extracts are of some importance, because they indicate the matters respecting which Fletcher was consulted, and also exhibit his own habitual frame of mind.

Before leaving the year 1764, one incident must be mentioned, far too interesting to be omitted. So far as there is evidence to show, there had been no interview, and, indeed, no correspondence, between Fletcher and Wesley since the year 1760, when Fletcher, contrary to the advice of Wesley, accepted the living of Madeley. There is not the slightest proof of any estrangement of affection having taken place; but Fletcher had been too much occupied to visit Wesley in London; and Wesley, considering the opposition Fletcher had to encounter, had, hitherto, not deemed it expedient to visit Fletcher at Madeley. As to epistolary correspondence, Charles Wesley was Fletcher's chosen adviser; and that, for the present, was quite enough. The Madeley persecutions had now subsided; and, hence, in the month of July, 1764, the *Arch-Methodist* ventured to invade the parish of the Madeley vicar. He wrote:—

"1764, Saturday, July 21. I rode to Bilbrook, near Wolverhampton, and preached at between two and three. Thence we went on to Madeley, an exceedingly pleasant village, encompassed with trees and hills. It was a great comfort to me to converse once more with a Methodist of the *old type*, denying himself, taking up his cross, and resolved to be 'altogether a Christian.'

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 153.

"Sunday, July 22. At ten, Mr. Fletcher read prayers, and I preached on those words in the Gospel, 'I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.' The church would nothing near contain the congregation; but a window near the pulpit being taken down, those who could not come in stood in the churchyard, and I believe all could hear. The congregation, they said, used to be much smaller in the afternoon than in the morning; but I could not discern the least difference, either in number or seriousness. I found employment enough for the intermediate hours in praying with various companies who hung about the house, insatiably hungering and thirsting after the good word. Mr. Grimshaw, at his first coming to Haworth, had not such a prospect as this. There are many adversaries indeed; but yet they cannot shut the open and effectual door.

"Monday, July 23. The church was pretty well filled even at five, and many stood in the churchyard. In the evening, I preached at Shrewsbury, to a large congregation, among whom were several men of fortune. I trust, though hitherto we seem to have been ploughing on the sand, there will at last be some fruit."[1]

Wesley's first visit to Madeley was, to himself, eminently satisfactory; and his report of it shows that, notwithstanding the "many adversaries," Fletcher's labours had been crowned with great success.

Truly might Wesley designate Fletcher "a Methodist of the old type, *denying himself*, and taking up his cross." The following letter, addressed "to Mr. Henry Perronet, at Mr. Wright's, at the Boot, in Old Street, St. Luke's Parish, London," will partly illustrate Wesley's meaning.

"MADELEY, *November* 6, 1765.

"SIR,—I have received both your letter and Mr. Charles Wesley's, and shall be exceeding glad of an opportunity to oblige or serve you in anything in my power.

"As you seem to me a stranger to the situation of the country, I would have you come down first, and choose for yourself a spot that may suit your taste. I live here in a little market-town, three or four miles from the foot of the Wrekin, at the south-east of that hill; so that you may easily take a walk or ride with me to some of the spots or villages where you may prefer to fix your abode, if this does not please you. I live alone in my house, having neither wife, child, nor servant. I can, therefore, without inconveniency, spare you a room in the meantime. If you choose to provide your food, you shall have conveniences for it; if you choose to table with a neighbour, as I do, you may.

"You seem to be cut out for contemplation and retirement, Sir;

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

I hope you have made choice of Jesus for the chief subject of your meditations. May you find much of His presence everywhere!

"If you choose to venture into Shropshire, you may take the Shrewsbury coach at the Swan, in Lad Lane, somewhere in the city, and in two days and a half you will be at Shiffnal, eighteen miles short of Shrewsbury, and three from Madeley. If you send me word when you are to set out, I will send my mare to meet you at the Red Lion, in Shiffnal, the day that the coach passes through the town.

"That the Lord may direct and prosper you in all things is the wish of, Sir, your affectionate servant in Christ,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

As a farther illustration of Fletcher's simplicity of living, and of his habitual piety, an incident may be introduced, belonging to *about* this period, and published in a sermon preached on the occasion of the death of Fletcher's widow, in 1816, by the Rev. John Hodson. Mr. Hodson says:—

"A few days ago, I was in company with a pious female, who, for many years, was intimately acquainted with Mr. Fletcher. She said Mr. Fletcher sometimes visited a boarding-school at Madeley. One morning he came in just as she and the other girls had sat down to breakfast. He said but little while the meal lasted, but when it was finished he spoke to each girl separately, and concluded by saying to the whole, 'I have waited some time on you this morning, that I might see you eat your breakfast; and I hope you will visit me to-morrow morning, and see how I eat mine.' He told them his breakfast hour was seven o'clock, and obtained a promise that they would visit him. Next morning, they went at the time appointed, and seated themselves in the kitchen. Mr. Fletcher came in, quite rejoiced to see them. On the table stood a small basin of milk and sops of bread. Mr. Fletcher took the basin across the kitchen, and sat down on an old bench. He then took out his watch, laid it before him, and said, 'My dear girls, yesterday morning I waited on you a full hour, while you were at breakfast. I shall take as much time this morning in eating my breakfast as I usually do, if not rather more. Look at my watch!' and he immediately began to eat, and continued in conversation with them. When he had finished, he asked them how long he had been at breakfast. They said, 'Just a minute and a half, Sir.' 'Now, my dear girls,' said he, 'we have fifty-eight minutes of the hour left;' and he then began to sing,—

"'Our life is a dream!
Our time as a stream
Glides swiftly away,
And the fugitive moment refuses to stay.'

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1825, p. 744.

After this, he gave them a lecture on the value of time, and the worth of the soul. They then all knelt down in prayer, after which he dismissed them with impressions on the mind the narrator never ceased to remember."

At Wesley's yearly Conference of 1765, Alexander Mather was appointed to "Salop" circuit, with William Minethorpe as his colleague. Mr. Mather was now in the thirty-third year of his age. During the last eight years, he had been an itinerant preacher, and had passed through strange and painful vicissitudes. In 1760 his circuit had been "Staffordshire;" in which circuit he had "built a preaching-house at Darlaston, and hired a large building at Birmingham." He had extended his labours as far as Shrewsbury, Coventry, Stroud, and Painswick; and, by Wesley's directions, had visited the "Societies" in Wales. At Birmingham, Mather and the poor Methodists had been repeatedly in danger of being murdered by persecuting crowds; and at Wolverhampton the mob had pulled down the newly-built meeting-house; and had threatened to do the same at Dudley, Darlaston, and Wednesbury. He had also preached at several places in Shropshire, and now, in 1765, the county was made a Methodist circuit, in which he was appointed to act as Wesley's "Assistant." Fletcher had already formed two or three Societies, which, without being so designated, were, *ipso facto*, Methodist Societies. He warmly welcomed Mather, and was more than willing to be a Methodist co-worker. Hence the following letter addressed to the brave itinerant:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I thank you for your last favour. If I answered not your former letter it was because I was in expectation of seeing you—not from the least disregard. I am glad you enjoy peace at Wellington; and I hope you will do so at the Trench when you go there. My reasons for stopping there were not to seize upon the spot *first*, but to fulfil a promise I made to the people, of visiting them. I *desire* you will call there as often as you have opportunity. An occasional exhortation from you or your companion,[1] at the Bank,[2] Dale,[3] etc., will be esteemed a favour; and I hope that my going, as Providence directs, to any of your places (leaving to you the management of the Societies), will be deemed no encroachment. In short, we need not make *two parties;* I know but *one* heaven below, and that is Jesus's love. Let us both go and abide in it; and when we have gathered as many as we can to go with us, too many will still stay behind.

---

[1] William Minethorpe, Mather's colleague.

[2] A place about five miles from Madeley, where Fletcher had gathered a small Society.

[3] Coalbrook Dale.

"I find there are in the ministry, as in the common experience of Christians, times which may be compared to winter. No great stir is made in the world of grace beside that of storms and offences, and the growth of the trees of the Lord are not showy; but when the tender buds of brotherly and redeeming love begin to fill, spring is at hand. The Lord give us harvest after seed time! Let us wait for fruit, as the husbandman; and remember, that he who believes does not make haste. The love of Christ be with us all. Pray for

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Thus began Methodism in the county of Salop, which circuit, in 1766, contained 587 members. It is only right to say, however, that, in the Minutes of Conference, the name of the circuit was, in that year, changed to "Staffordshire,"—a name which it retained till 1782, though it embraced a number of towns and villages in the county where the Madeley vicar lived and laboured.

In 1765 Fletcher made two evangelistic visits. The first of these was to Breedon, in Leicestershire. Walter Sellon had been one of the first masters of Wesley's Kingswood school, had acted as one of Wesley's preachers, and, by the influence of the Countess of Huntingdon, had received episcopal ordination. At this period, he held two curacies, one at Smisby and the other at Breedon-on-the-Hill. His churches were generally crowded, and his ministry was attended with uncommon power. He lived in the house of Mr. Hall, of Tonge, the leader of Methodist Society classes at Breedon, Worthington, and Diseworth, and who, after living all his life in the house where he was born, peacefully fell asleep in Jesus in the year 1813, at the age of eighty-one.[2] Of course Fletcher's reputation was well known by Sellon; and now, in 1765, for a brief season, they exchanged pulpits. Immense crowds assembled; and exceedingly picturesque must have been the sight of long processions of pious people climbing the lofty hill on the top of which Breedon church was built, and singing as they went their sweet songs of Zion. The church was crammed when Fletcher preached; numbers stood outside; and as many as could clambered to the windows to look at the seraphic minister to whom they wished to listen.[1] Mr. Benson, in his "Life of Fletcher," relates an incident which must not be omitted here. Human nature is the same all the world over, and throughout all generations.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 163.
[2] *Methodist Magazine*, 1818, pp. 49-57.

We are told the clerk of Breedon church was offended because the crowds attending it increased his labour in cleaning it. Turning his worldly-wisdom to practical account, he began to charge persons, from other parishes, a penny each for admission, and stood at the church door to collect the money. Whilst he was doing this, Fletcher was prayerfully ascending the steep hill, and reverentially contemplating the solemn service upon which he was about to enter. One of the congregation went to meet him, and told him of the clerk's worldliness. Fletcher was shocked at the behaviour of his ecclesiastical subordinate, and hastening up the steep ascent, exclaimed, "I'll stop his proceeding." The clerk, however, was more nimble than the priest. Before Fletcher could reach the money-gate the clerk was in his desk, ready to read responses and perform all the other duties pertaining to his office. Perhaps he thought he had cleverly escaped detection and reproof, but the sordid creature was mistaken. Fletcher went through the service, and then remarked, "For sixteen years I have not been so moved as I have been to-day. I am told that the clerk beneath me has demanded, and has actually received, money from strangers before he would suffer them to enter the church. I desire all who have paid the money to come to me, and I will return what they have paid; and as to this iniquitous clerk, his money perish with him!"

This interesting story is not without its use, for it exhibits Fletcher's almost stern fidelity, and also the spirit of parish clerks more than a hundred years ago. It would be unfair, however, to ostracize the Breedon official as one whose worldly wickedness is without a parallel; for there is little room to doubt that even at the present day largess is often levied upon congregations, if not by responding clerks, by doorkeepers and other officials belonging to the ecclesiastical edifices of an age which thinks itself greatly in advance of its predecessors.

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1856, pp. 36-38.

Fletcher made another and more important Gospel tour during the year 1765. For the first time, he visited Bath and Bristol. In the former city, Lady Huntingdon had erected a chapel, and had summoned six clergymen of the Church of England to assist at the opening; namely, Whitefield, Romaine, Venn, Madan, Shirley, and Townsend. This took place on October 6, 1765.[1] Fletcher came after them, and preached to the aristocratic congregations in her ladyship's meeting-house with extraordinary zeal and earnestness. The Countess wrote:—

> "Deep and awful are the impressions made on every hand. Dear Mr. Fletcher's preaching is truly apostolic. The Divine blessing accompanies his word in a very remarkable manner. He is ever at his work, is amazingly followed, and is singularly owned of God."[2]

During his stay at Bath, Fletcher wrote his *first pastoral letter*, which was addressed, "To those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in or about Madeley. Peace be multiplied to you from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, through the operations of the Holy Ghost. Amen." The letter was dated "Bath, October 30, 1765," and the following is the substance of it:—

> "By the help of Divine Providence, and the assistance of your prayers, I came safe hither last Saturday se'nnight. I was and am still a good deal weighed down under the sense of my insufficiency to preach the unspeakable riches of Christ to poor dying souls. This place is the seat of Satan's gaudy throne; but the Lord hath nevertheless a few names here that are not ashamed of Him, both among the poor and among the rich. There are not many of the latter, but blessed be God for any one! It is a great miracle if one camel passes through the eye of a needle; or, in other words, if one rich person enters the kingdom of God. I thank God that none of you are rich in the things of this world. You are freed from a dreadful snare, even from Dives' portion in this world. May you know the happiness of your state! It is a mercy to be driven to the throne of grace even by bodily want, and to live in dependence on Divine mercy even for a morsel of bread.

---

[1] See "Life of Whitefield," vol. ii., p. 489.

[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 469.

"I have been sowing the seed, that the Lord hath given, both in Bath and Bristol; and, though I have not been able to discharge my office as I would, the Lord has in some measure stood by me, and overruled my foolishness and helplessness. I am much supported by the thought that 'you pray for me.' With regard to the state of my soul, I find, blessed be God! that as my day is, so is my strength to travel on, without minding much either good or bad report.

"My absence from you answers two good ends in regard of me. I feel more my insufficiency, and the need of being daily ordained of Christ to preach His Gospel; and I shall value the more the worth of my privilege with you if I return safely to you. I had yesterday a most advantageous offer made me of going free of cost to my own country, to see my mother, brothers, and sisters in the flesh, whom I have not seen for near eighteen years; but I find my relations in the spirit are nearer and dearer to me than my relations in the flesh. I have therefore refused the kind offer, that I might return to you, and be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me.

"I hope, my dear brethren, that you improve much under the ministry of that faithful servant of God, Mr. Brown,[1] whom Providence blesses you with. Make haste to gather the honey of knowledge and grace as it drops from his lips; and may I find the hive of your heart so full of it at my return, that I may share with you in the heavenly store!

"In order to this, entreat the Lord to stir up your hunger and thirst after the flesh and blood of Jesus, and to increase your desire for the sincere milk of the Word. When people are hungry they will find time to go to their meals; and a good appetite does not think a meal a day too much. Be not satisfied with knowing the way to heaven, but walk in it constantly and joyfully. Be thoroughly in earnest. You may impose upon your brethren by a formal attendance on the means of grace, but you cannot deceive the Searcher of hearts. Let Him then see your heart struggling towards Him; and if you fall through heaviness, sloth, or unbelief, do not make a bad matter worse by continuing hopeless in the ditch of sin and guilt. Up and away to the blood of Jesus! It will not only wash away the guilt of past sins, but strengthen you to trample all iniquity under foot in the time to come. Never forget that the soul of the diligent shall be made fat; and that the Lord will spue the lukewarm out of His mouth. Get, therefore, that love which makes you diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

"I beg you will not neglect the assembling of yourselves together, and, when you meet in Society, be neither backward nor forward to speak. Let every one esteem himself the meanest in the company, and be glad to sit at the feet of the lowest. If you are tempted against any one, yield not to the temptation; and pray for much of that love which hopeth all things, and puts the best constructions even upon the worst of things.

---

[1] A clergyman whom James Ireland, Esq., of Brislington, near Bristol, had obtained to supply Fletcher's pulpit at Madeley. See a subsequent letter, dated April 27, 1767.

I beg, for Christ's sake, I may find no division and no offence among you at my return. 'If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercy, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the others better than himself.'

"I earnestly beg the continuance of your prayers for me, that the Lord may keep me from hurting His cause in these parts, and that when Providence shall bring me back among you (which I hope will be this day fortnight), I may be thoroughly furnished for every good word and work. That the blessing of God may crown all your hearts and your meetings, is the earnest prayer of, my very dear brethren,

"Your unworthy servant in the Gospel of our common Lord,

"JOHN FLETCHER.

"P.S.—I had not time to finish this letter yesterday, being called upon to preach in a market town in the neighbourhood. The dragon showed some of his spite and venom to little purpose. A gentleman churchwarden would hinder my getting into the pulpit, and, in order to this, cursed and swore, and took another gentleman by the collar in the middle of the church. Notwithstanding his rage, I preached. May the Lord raise in power what was sown in weakness!"[1]

From this interesting letter, it appears that Fletcher spent four Sundays at Bath and Bristol. No doubt, he was the guest of the Countess of Huntingdon; but, at the same time, he formed an acquaintance with the excellent James Ireland, Esq., of Brislington, with whom he commenced a correspondence two or three months afterwards, which was continued to the end of life. There can hardly be a doubt that Mr. Ireland was the gentleman who offered to take Fletcher to Switzerland, free of cost. At this time, Mr. Ireland's daughter was out of health, and for many years afterwards he was accustomed to go to the south of France for the benefit of himself and his family.

Eighteen years had elapsed since Fletcher had seen his mother, his brothers, and his sisters, and of course he wished to visit them; but there was his work at Madeley, and that was enough to make him forego what, under other circumstances, must have been an unspeakable pleasure. Some will accuse him of the want of natural affection, and will say he owed duties to his distant and long unseen relatives, as well as to his parishioners. Probably, in answer to such a charge, he would have quoted the words of his supreme Master: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters." By the Rev. J. Fletcher. Bath: 1791, p. 10.

It is evident, from Fletcher's pastoral epistle, that his preaching in the west of England was not confined to Bath and Bristol; but, except the disgraceful incident of the profane churchwarden swearing and almost fighting to keep him out of the pulpit of a church in some neighbouring market town, no details of his tour have been preserved. The letters and journals of Wesley and Whitefield abound with facts and adventures, full of interest and instruction: the letters of Fletcher were of another character. They are rich in truth and piety; but not always in materials for biography. His habitual self-abnegation kept in the shade thousands of facts which the curiosity of the Christian world would like to know.

The first two years he spent at Madeley were rough and stormy. He worked with all his might, but with small results. The next three years were comparatively calm and prosperous. Opposition gradually died. His labours were attended with success. He formed several Societies of converted people; and his friend Wesley made the county of Salop a Methodist circuit. For nearly five years he had confined his evangelistic efforts to his own immediate neighbourhood; after this, to a considerable extent, he became an itinerant. Let us follow him.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO YEARS MORE.

1766 AND 1767.

FLETCHER began the year 1766 in mournfulness, and yet full of love and loyalty to Christ. In a letter to Miss Hatton, he wrote :—

"MADELEY, *January* 13, 1766.

"MADAM,—This evening I have buried one of the warmest opposers of my ministry—a stout, strong young man, aged twenty-four years. About three months ago, he came to the churchyard with a corpse, but refused to come into the church. When the burial was over, I went to him, and mildly expostulated with him. His constant answer was, that he had bound himself never to come to church while I was there; adding, that he would take the consequences. Seeing I got nothing, I left him, saying, with uncommon warmth, though, as far as I can remember, without the least touch of resentment, 'I am clear of your blood; henceforth it is upon your own head; you will not come to church upon your legs, prepare to come upon your *neighbours' shoulders!*' He wasted from that time, and, to my great surprise, has been buried on the spot where we were when the conversation passed between us. When I visited him in his sickness, he seemed *tame*, as a wolf in a trap. O may God have turned him into a sheep in his last hours!

"This last year has been the worst I have had here,—barren in convictions, fruitful in backslidings.

"I have filled my page, but not with the name of Jesus. Let your heart contain what my letter wants,—*Jesus and His precious blood,—Jesus and His free, glorious salvation.* Live to Him; breathe for Him; buy, sell, eat, drink, read, write for Him. Receive Him as *yours* altogether, and give Him your *whole* self. Take us, Lord, into Thy gracious favour; stamp us with Thy glorious image, and conduct us to Thy eternal kingdom!"[1]

Fletcher was depressed. His labours at Madeley, during the past year, had not been fruitful; and concerning his success even at Bath he was doubtful. Mr. Brown, his temporary curate, however, seems to have been useful; and so also were Wesley's itinerant evangelists; on account of which he thankfully rejoiced. In another letter to Miss Hatton, he wrote:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 165.

"MADELEY, *May* 27, 1766.

"The coming of Mr. Wesley's preachers into my parish gives me no uneasiness. As I am sensible that everybody does better, and is more acceptable than myself, I should be sorry to deprive any one of a blessing; and I rejoice that the work of God goes on, by *any instrument*, or in *any place*. How far it might have been expedient to have postponed preaching regularly in my parish, till the minister of —— had been reconciled to the invasion of his; and how far this might have made my way smoother, I do not pretend to determine: time will show it, and in the meanwhile I find it good to have faith in Providence.

"I fear I have left as great a stink at Bath as Mr. Brown a sweet savour here. Everything is good to me that shows me my unprofitableness; but I desire to grieve, that the good of my private humiliation is so much overbalanced by the loss of many about me."[1]

Thus did Fletcher depreciate himself. The truth is, he was in feeble health, and hardly knew it. At this time, also, two of his dear friends were dying—Miss Hatton, of Wem, and Miss Ireland, the only daughter of James Ireland, Esq., of Brislington, Bristol. Miss Hatton had been at Madeley, and Miss Ireland was about to migrate to the south of France. To these ladies, he wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *June* 21, 1766.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am much concerned to hear, by Mrs. Tower, that you are so weak; but my concern has greatly increased, since I was told that the foundation of your illness was laid at Madeley; and, I am afraid, by my imprudence in taking you to the woman with whom we received the sacrament. I ask God's pardon and yours for it; and I hope it will be the means of humbling me, and of making me more tender of my friends.

"The advice you give me about my health is seasonable. I hope to follow it. I am not conscious of having neglected it; but I will endeavour that there be not so much as the shadow of a call for repeating it.

"If the air at Wem does not agree with you, could you not come to Madeley? Though I am no nurse, and though I have been the contrary of one to you, I hope we should wait upon you with more tenderness than when you were here last. Mrs. Power would nurse you, and I would talk to you of the love of Jesus as well as I could. You know

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 169.

I perceived your bodily weakness when you were here, and charged you with a neglect of your body. If I was right, I hope you will follow the advice you give me.

"Offer yourself to God for life or death, for ease or pain, for strength or weakness. Let Him choose or refuse for you; only do you choose Him for your present and eternal portion."[1]

Seven months after this, Miss Hatton peacefully expired.[2] Miss Ireland lived more than two years longer. To her, he wrote the following:—

"MADELEY, *July* —, 1766.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—The poor account your father has brought us of your health, and his apprehensions of not seeing you any more, before that solemn day when all people, nations, and tongues shall stand together at the bar of God, make me venture to send you a few lines.

"First, then, my dear friend, let me beseech you not to flatter yourself with the hopes of living long here on earth. These hopes fill us with worldly thoughts, and make us backward to prepare for our change. I would not, for the world, entertain such thoughts about myself. I have now, in my parish, a young man who has been two years under the surgeon's hands. Since he was given up, about two months ago, he has fled to the Lord, and has found in Him that saving health, which a thousand times surpasses that with which the surgeon flattered him; and he now longs to be with Christ, which is far better.

"Secondly. Consider, my dear, how good the Lord is to call you to be transplanted into a better world, before you have taken deeper root in this sinful world. If it is hard to nature to die *now*, how much harder would it be if you lived to be the mother of a family, and to cleave to earth by the ties of new relations, schemes of gain, or prospects of success!

"Thirdly. Reflect that, by your illness, the Lord, who forecasts for us, intimates that long life would not be for His glory, nor your happiness. I believe He takes many young people from the evil to come, and out of the way of those temptations, or misfortunes, which would have made them miserable in time and in eternity.

"Fourthly. Your earthly father loves you much: witness the hundreds of miles he has gone for the benefit of your health; but your heavenly Father loves you a thousand times better; and He is all wisdom, as well as all goodness. Allow, then, such a loving, gracious Father to chose for you; and, if He chooses death, acquiesce, and say, 'Good is the will of the Lord! His choice must be best!'

"Fifthly. Weigh the sinfulness of sin, both original and actual, and firmly believe the wages of sin is death. This will make you patiently accept the punishment; especially if you consider that Jesus Christ, by dying for us, has taken away the sting of death, and turned the grave into a passage to a blessed eternity.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 170.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 190.

"Sixthly. Try to get nearer to the dear Redeemer. He offers rest to the heavy laden, pardon to the guilty, strength to the feeble, and life to the dead.

"Seventhly. When you have considered your lost state, as a sinner, together with the greatness, the freeness, and the suitableness of Christ's salvation, believe in Him. Be not afraid to venture upon and trust in Him. Cast yourself on Him by frequent acts of reliance, and stay your soul on Him by means of His promises. Pray much for faith, and be not afraid of accepting, using, and thanking God for *a little*.

"Eighthly. Beware of impatience, repining, and peevishness, which are the sins of sick people. Be gentle, easy to be pleased, and resigned as the bleeding Lamb of God. Wrong tempers indulged, grieve, if they do not quench, the Spirit.

"Ninthly. Do not repine at being in a strange country, far from your friends; and, if your going to France does not answer the end proposed for your body, it will answer a spiritual end to your soul.

"Tenthly. In praying, reading, hearing any person read, and meditating, do not consult feeble, fainting, weary flesh and blood; for, at this rate, death may find you idle, and supine, instead of striving to enter in at the strait gate; and, when your strength and vigour fail, remember that the Lord is the strength of your life and your portion for ever."[1]

Not many even faithful ministers of Christ would have written in such a strain as this to a young lady, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, leaving her native land, and apparently dying; but Fletcher, like all the first Methodists, was intensely in earnest, and never thought of sacrificing fidelity for the sake of seeming courtesy.

The young lady's father had given Fletcher a hamper of wine, and a parcel of broadcloth to be made into a suit of clothes, kindly requesting him not to send his coat again to be patched. In acknowledging this generous present, the needy and somewhat seedy Vicar wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *July* —, 1766.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—You should have a little mercy on your friends, in not loading them with such burdens of beneficence. How would you like to be loaded with kindnesses you could not return? Were it not for a little of that grace which makes us not only willing, but happy to be nothing, to be obliged and dependent, your present would make me quite miserable. I submit to be clothed and nourished by you, as your servants are, without the happiness of serving you. To yield to this is as hard to friendship as it is to submit to be saved by free grace, without one scrap of our own righteousness. However, we are allowed, both in religion and friendship, to ease ourselves by thanks and prayers, till we have an opportunity of doing it by actions. I thank you then, my dear friend, and pray to God that you may receive His benefits as I do yours.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 174.

"Your broadcloth can lap me round two or three times; but the mantle of Divine love, the precious fine robe of Jesus's righteousness, can cover your soul a thousand times. The cloth, fine and good as it is, will not keep out a hard shower; but that garment of salvation will keep out even a shower of brimstone and fire. Your cloth will wear out; but that fine linen, the righteousness of saints, will appear with a finer lustre the more it is worn. The moth may fret your present, or the tailor may spoil it in cutting it; but the present, which Jesus has made you, is out of the reach of the spoiler, and ready for present wear. Let me beseech you, my dear friend, to accept of this heavenly present, as I accept of your earthly one. I did not send you one farthing to purchase it: it came unsought, unasked, unexpected, as the seed of the woman came. It came just as I was sending a tailor to buy me cloth for a new coat, and I hope when you next see me, it will be in your present; now let Jesus see you in His. Accept it freely. Wear no more the old rusty coat of nature and self-righteousness. Send no more to have it *patched*. Make your boast of an unbought suit, and love to wear the livery of Jesus.

"You will then love His work. It will be your meat and drink to do it; and, that you may be vigorous in doing it, as I shall take a little of your wine for my stomach's sake, take you a good deal of the wine of the kingdom for your soul's sake. Every promise of the Gospel is a bottle, a cask that has a spring within, and can never be exhausted. Draw the cork of unbelief, and drink abundantly. Be not afraid of intoxication; and if an inflammation follows, it will only be that of Divine love. Be more free with the heavenly wine, than I have been with the earthly, which you sent me. I have not tasted it yet, but whose fault is it? Not yours certainly, but mine. If you do not drink daily out of the cup of salvation, whose fault is it? Not Jesus's, but yours. Jesus gives you His righteousness to cover your nakedness, and the consolations of His Spirit to cheer and invigorate your soul. Accept and use. Wear, drink, and live to God."[1]

Fletcher was religious in everything, and all his faculties were sanctified. He could not even acknowledge the kindness of his friend without introducing religion; but, to do this gracefully, he exercises, not his manly understanding, but his sportive fancy. "Fancy," said fanciful Thomas Fuller, "can adorn whatever it touches, can invest naked fact and dry reasoning with unlooked-for beauty, make flowerets bloom even on the brow of a precipice, and, when nothing better can be had, can turn the very substance of the rock itself into moss and lichens." Few men have possessed a finer fancy than Fletcher did; but his was rarely used except for religious purposes. He might have been an accomplished allegorist; but he preferred to be a scriptural reasoner. His creed was founded, not upon fancies, but upon facts. Hence, in the same month that he wrote the foregoing letter to Mr. Ireland, he wrote as follows to Miss Hatton:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 178.

"MADELEY, *July* 17, 1766.

"Let your faith be *rational* as well as affectionate. God is good. He does not want us to take His word without proof. What expectations of the Messiah from the beginning of the world! What amazing miracles and wonders were wrought in favour of that people and family, from which He was to come! What prophecies fulfilled, that we might rationally believe! What displays of the Godhead in that heavenly man, Christ Jesus! *In Him dwelt*, of a truth, *the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. You see the power of God in His miracles; the goodness of God in His character; the justice and mercy of God in His death; the truth, and faithfulness, and glory of God in His resurrection, in the coming of His Spirit, and in the preaching of His everlasting Gospel. O, my friend, we may believe *rationally*. We may, with calm attention, view the emptiness of all other religions, and the fulness of assurance that ours affords."[1]

Soon after the date of this letter, Fletcher proceeded to London, to Brighton, and to Oathall, where he had sweet intercourse with the Countess of Huntingdon, Romaine, Venn, Sir Charles Hotham, and with a gentleman and lady from his own country, who were visiting the Countess, and Mr. and Mrs. Powys of Berwick, in Shropshire, Mr. Powys being a gentleman of high connections and of large fortune, and who had, about this period, become conspicuous, in conjunction with Sir Richard Hill and Mr. Lee, of Cotery, for zeal in the cause of God and truth.[2]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 180.
[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 375.

While staying with Lady Huntingdon at Oathall, Fletcher wrote another pastoral letter, which could not have been more faithful, but might, perhaps with advantage, have been more gentle.

"OATHALL, SUSSEX, *September* 23, 1766.

"To those who love or fear the Lord Jesus at Madeley, grace, peace, and love be multiplied unto you, from our God and Saviour Jesus Christ!

"Providence, my dear brethren, called me so suddenly from among you, that I had no time to take my leave of you, and recommend myself to your prayers. But I hope the good Spirit of our God, who is the Spirit of love and supplication, has brought me to your remembrance, as the poorest and weakest of Christ's ministers, whose hands stand most in need of being strengthened and lifted up by your prayers. Pray on then, for yourselves, for one another, and for him whose glory it is to minister to you in spiritual things, and whose sorrow it is not to do it in a manner more suitable to the majesty of the Gospel, and more profitable to your souls. My heart is with you, nevertheless I bear patiently this bodily separation for three reasons.

"1. The variety of more faithful and able ministers, which you have during my absence, is more likely to be serviceable to you than my presence among you, and I would always prefer your profit to my own satisfaction.

"2. I hope Providence will give me those opportunities of conversing and praying with a greater variety of experienced Christians, which will tend to my own improvement, and, I trust, in the end, to yours.

"3. I flatter myself that, after some weeks' absence, my ministry will be recommended by the advantage of novelty, which (the more the pity) goes farther with some than the Word itself. In the meantime, I shall give you some advice, which, it may be, will prove both suitable and serviceable to you.

"Endeavour to improve daily under the ministry that Providence blesses you with. Be careful to attend it with diligence, faith, and prayer. Would it not be a great shame if, when ministers come thirty or forty miles to offer you peace and pardon, strength and comfort, in the name of God, any of you should slight the glorious message, or hear it as if it was nothing to you, and as if you heard it not? See then that you never come from a sermon without being more deeply convinced of sin and righteousness. In order to this,—

"Use much prayer before you go to church. Consider that your next appearance there may be in a coffin, and entreat the Lord to give you now so to hunger and thirst after righteousness that you may be filled therewith. Hungry people never go fasting from a feast. Call to mind the text I preached from the last Sunday but one before I left you,—'Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby' (1 Peter ii. 1, 2).

"When you are under the Word, beware of sitting as judges, and not like criminals. Many judge of the manner, matter, voice, or person of the preacher. You, perhaps, judge all the congregation when you should judge yourselves guilty of eternal death and yet worthy of eternal life, through the worthiness of Him who stood and was condemned at Pilate's bar for you. The moment you have done crying to God as guilty, or thanking Christ as reprieved, criminals, you have reason to believe that this advice is levelled at you.

"When you have been at a means of grace and do not find yourselves sensibly quickened, let it be matter of deep humiliation to you. For want of repenting of their unbelief and hardness of heart, some get into a habit of deadness and indolence, so that they come to be as insensible and as little ashamed of themselves as stones.

"Beware of the inconsistent behaviour of those who complain that they are full of wandering in the evening under the Word when they have suffered their minds to wander from Christ all the day long. Oh! get acquainted with Him, that you may walk in Him and with Him. Whatsoever you do or say, especially in the things of God, do or say it as if Christ was before, behind, and on each side of you. Indeed, He is so, whether you consider it or not; for when He visibly appeared on earth, He called Himself 'the Son of Man which is in heaven;' how much more then is He present on earth now that He makes His immediate appearance in heaven? Make conscience then to maintain a sense of His blessed presence all the day long, and all the day long you will have a continual feast. For, can you conceive anything more delightful than to be always at the fountain of love, peace, beauty, and joy,—at the spring of power, wisdom, goodness, and truth? Can there be a purer and more melting happiness than to be with the best of fathers, the kindest of brothers, the most generous of benefactors, and the tenderest of husbands? Now Jesus is all this and much more to the believing soul. Oh! believe, my friends, believe in Jesus now, through a continual now; and until you can thus believe, mourn over your unbelieving heart; drag it to Him as you can; think of the efficacy of His blood shed for the ungodly; and wait for the Spirit of faith from on high.

"Some of you wonder why you cannot believe, why you cannot see Jesus with the eye of your mind, and delight in Him with the affections of your heart. I apprehend the reason to be one of these, or perhaps altogether.

"1. You are not poor, lost, undone, helpless, despairing sinners in yourselves. You indulge spiritual and refined self-righteousness; you are not yet dead to the law, and quite slain by the commandment. Now the kingdom of heaven belongs to none but the poor in spirit. Jesus came to save none but the lost. What wonder then, if Jesus is little to you, and if you do not live in His kingdom of peace, righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost?

"2. Perhaps you spend your time in curious reasonings, instead of casting yourselves as forlorn sinners at the feet of Christ, leaving it to Him to bless you when and in the manner He pleases. Know that

He is the wise and sovereign God, and that it is your duty to lie before Him as clay, as fools, as sinful nothings.

"3. Perhaps, also, some of you wilfully keep idols of one kind or another; you indulge some sin against light and knowledge, and it is neither matter of humiliation, nor of confession to you. The love of praise, that of the world, that of money, and that of sensual gratifications, when not lamented, are as implacable enemies to Christ as Judas and Herod were. How can ye believe, seeing ye seek the honour that cometh from men? Hew then your Agags in pieces before the Lord. Run from your Delilahs to Jesus resolutely. Cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye that offends you. 'Come out from among them, and be separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you.' Nevertheless, when you strive, take care not to make yourself a righteousness of your own striving. Remember that justifying righteousness is finished and brought in, and that your goodness can no more add to it than your sins diminish it. Shout then, '*the Lord your Righteousness!*' And, if you are undone sinners, humbly and yet boldly say, 'In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.'

"When I was in London, I endeavoured to make the best of my time; that is to say, to hear, receive, and practise the Word. Accordingly, I went to Mr. Whitefield's Tabernacle, and heard him give his Society a most sweet exhortation upon love. He began by observing that when the Apostle St. John was old and past walking and preaching, he would not forsake the assembling himself with his brethren, as the manner of too many is, upon little or no pretence at all. On the contrary, he got himself carried to their meeting, and, with his last thread of voice, preached to them his final sermon made up of this one sentence, 'My little children, love one another.' I wish, I pray, I earnestly beseech you to follow that evangelical, apostolical advice; and till God makes you all little children, little in your own eyes, and simple as little children, give me leave to say, dear brethren, love one another, and, of course, judge not, provoke not, be not shy of one another, but bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Yea, bear with one another's infirmities, and do not easily cast off any one, no not for sin, except it be obstinately persisted in.

"My sheet is full, and so is my heart of good wishes for and strong longing after you all. I have just room to tell you I hope to be with you in three or four weeks' time. Oh! let me have the comfort of finding you all believing and loving. Farewell, my dear brethren! The blessing of God be with you all! This is the earnest desire of

"Your unworthy minister,
"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

This is a long but valuable letter—valuable for the sentiments and advice it contains, and also as showing Fletcher's loving and faithful passion to save the souls of his parishioners. Comment upon it would be easy, but is unnecessary. When he wrote it, on September 23, he intended to return to Madeley in "three or four weeks' time," but at the beginning of November he was still in London. In a letter to Mr. Powys, dated the first of that month, Whitefield remarked, "Dear Mr. Fletcher is become a scandalous Tottenham Court preacher."[1] How long he continued to officiate in Whitefield's far-famed chapel it is impossible to tell; but at the beginning of 1767 he was at Madeley, and wrote to Miss Hatton as follows:—

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters," by Fletcher, published at Bath in 1791, p. 20.

"MADELEY, *January* 9, 1767.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—The dream of life will soon be over; the morning of eternity will soon succeed. Away then with all the shadows of time! Away from them to the *Eternal Substance—to Jesus, the First and the Last, by whom, and for whom, all things consist.* If you take Jesus to be your head, by the mystery of faith, you will be united to the resurrection and the life. The bitterness of death is past, my dear friend. *Only* look to Jesus. He died for you—died in your place—died under the frowns of heaven, that we might die under its smiles. Regard neither unbelief nor doubt. Fear neither sin nor hell. Choose neither life nor death. All these are swallowed up in the immensity of Christ, and are triumphed over in His cross. Fight the good fight of faith. Hold fast your confidence in the atoning, sanctifying blood of the Lamb of God. Confer no more with flesh and blood. Go, meet the bridegroom. Behold He cometh! Trim your lamp. Quit yourself like a soldier of Jesus. I *entreat* you, as a companion in tribulation; I *charge* you, as a minister, go, at every breath you draw, to Him, who says, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out:' and 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' Joyfully sing the believer's song, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!' Let your surviving friends triumph over you, as one faithful unto death,—as one triumphing in death itself."[2]

Three weeks after this, the Christian lady thus addressed was dead.[3] Fletcher, in a letter to Mr. Ireland, wrote:—

"Poor Miss Hatton died full of serenity, faith, and love. The four last hours of her life were better than all her sickness. When the pangs of death were upon her, the comforts of the Almighty bore her triumphantly through, and some of her last words were: 'Grieve not at my happiness. This world is no more to me than a bit of burnt paper. Grace! Grace! A sinner saved! I wish I could tell you half of what I feel and see. I am going to keep an everlasting Sabbath. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through my Lord Jesus Christ!' It is very remarkable that she had hardly any joy in her illness; but God made her ample amends in her extremity. He keeps His strongest cordial for the time of need. Blessed, for ever blessed, be His holy name!"[1]

---

[1] Whitefield's Works, vol. iii., p. 339.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 189.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 190.

As already stated, Fletcher, when in London, had preached in Tottenham Court Road Chapel. Whitefield wrote a letter, thanking him for his services. Fletcher's highly characteristic reply was as follows:—

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I am confounded when I receive a letter from you. Present and eternal contempt from Christ and all His members is what I deserve. A sentence of death is my due; but, instead of it, I am favoured with lines of love. Your mentioning my poor ministrations among your congregation opens again a wound of shame, that was but half healed. I feel the need of asking God, you, and your hearers to pardon me, for weakening the glorious matter of the Gospel by my wretched broken manner, and for spoiling the heavenly power of it by the uncleanness of my heart and lips.

"I should be glad to be your curate some time this year; but I see no opening, nor the least prospect of any. What between the dead and living, a parish ties one down more than a wife. If I could go anywhere this year, it should be to Yorkshire, to accompany Lady Huntingdon, according to a design that I had half formed last year; but I fear I shall be debarred even from this. I set out, God willing, to-morrow morning for Trevecca, to meet her ladyship there, and to show her the way to Madeley, where she proposes to stay three or four days, on her way to Derbyshire.

"Last Sunday seven-night, Captain Scott preached to my congregation a sermon, which was more blessed, though preached only upon my horse-block, than a hundred of those I preach in the pulpit. I invited him to come and treat her ladyship next Sunday with another, now the place is consecrated. If you should ever favour Shropshire with your presence, you shall have the captain's, or the parson's, pulpit at your option. Many ask me, whether you will not come to have some fruit here also. What must I answer them? I, and many more, complain of a stagnation of the work. What must we do? Everything buds and blossoms about us, yet our winter is not over.

"Present my Christian respects to Mrs. Whitefield, Mr. Hardy, Mr.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 192.

Keen, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Croom, and Mr. Wright. Tell Mr. Keen I am a letter in his debt, and postpone writing it till I have had such a sight of Christ as to breathe His love through every line.

"I am, rev. and dear Sir, with sincere affection and respect, your willing, though halting and unworthy servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Captain Scott, the martial evangelist, mentioned in this letter, was a Shropshire man, and belonged to an ancient and respectable family. He had begun his military life as a cornet, and had been promoted to the rank of captain in the 7th regiment of dragoons. A short time before his first visit to Madeley, Fletcher, in a letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, remarked :—

> "I went last Monday to meet Captain Scott, one of the fruits that have grown for the Lord at Oathall,—a captain of a truth—a bold soldier of Christ. God has thrown down before him the middle wall of bigotry, and he boldly launches into an irregular usefulness. For some months, he has exhorted his dragoons daily; and, for some weeks, he has preached publicly in the Methodist Meeting House, in his regimentals, to numerous congregations, with good success. The stiff regular ones pursue him with hue and cry; but, I believe, he is quite beyond their reach. God keep him zealous and simple! I believe this *red coat* will shame many a *black one*. I am sure he shames me."[2]

In the year 1767, the Countess of Huntingdon was much occupied in making preparations for the opening of her college at Trevecca, in Wales. From the commencement of this important project, Fletcher was one of her ladyship's chosen advisers. In the month of April, he met her at Trevecca, and escorted her to Madeley, where she spent several days on her way to Yorkshire. The visit was a memorable one. Her ladyship was accompanied by Lady Anne Erskine and Miss Orton. The rich Christian communion of these three noble ladies with the poor vicar may be imagined, but cannot be described. It was, probably, at this period that the Countess was led to think of Fletcher as the future president of her college. At all events, in the following year, he was appointed to that important office.[3]

---

[1] *Evangelical Magazine*, 1802, p. 346.

[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., pp. 317, 318.

[3] *Ibid*, vol. i., p. 288; ii., p. iv.

Captain Scott also was at Madeley, and though Fletcher, of course, could not allow him the use of the pulpit of the parish church, he had him mounted upon the horse-block of the parish parsonage, where he preached twice, on Sunday, to large congregations; and on the day following, in Madeley Wood, an immense concourse of people assembled to hear him, many of whom were drawn thither by curiosity, to see the famous Countess and the preaching soldier.

Up to the time of the Countess's visit, Fletcher was in doubt whether he would be able to attend her in Yorkshire, but, before she left Madeley Vicarage, it was arranged that he should follow her immediately after Whit-Sunday. Mr. Ireland wished him to visit Bristol, and certainly he had some claim upon him; for, to say nothing of the valuable presents he had sent, for the use of Fletcher and the poor of Madeley, he had secured for them a most acceptable curate, to serve the parish during Fletcher's absence. Fletcher, for the present, was obliged to decline his friend's invitation. Hence the following letter to him :—

"MADELEY, *April* 27, 1767.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I have just received your letter, upon my arrival from Wales with dear Lady Huntingdon, who is, of a truth, a *tried stone*, built upon the *corner stone*, and such as you have seen her, such, I am persuaded, you will find her to the last,—a soul devoted to Jesus, living by faith, going to Christ Himself by the Scriptures, instead of resting in the letter of the Gospel promises, as too many professors do.

"I thank you for your care to procure not only a supply for my church, but such an agreeable, acceptable, and profitable one as Mr. Brown. I know no one that should be more welcome than he. Tell him, with a thousand thanks for his condescension, that I deliver my charge over to him fully, and give him a *carte blanche*, to do or not to do, as the Lord will direct him. I have settled it, that I shall endeavour to overtake my lady at Kippax, in Yorkshire, against the Sunday after Whitsuntide

"With regard to the Bristol journey, I must first come from the north, before I dream of going to the south. God help us to steer immovably to the grand point of our salvation,—*Jesus*, the *Crucified!* To Him I recommend myself, and you, and my noble guests. Love Him,—praise Him,—serve Him, who hath loved you, bought you, and died for you."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 196.

In the year 1767, Whit-Sunday occurred on June 7, and, during the week following, Fletcher joined the Countess of Huntingdon at Huddersfield, where her ladyship was staying, for a few days, with Venn, at the vicarage. On Sunday, the 14th, he preached twice in Venn's church, to large and deeply attentive congregations. He then accompanied the Countess to Aberford, on a visit to Benjamin Ingham, who had married her niece, Lady Margaret Hastings. Whilst there, accompanied by the Rev. Joseph Townsend, Rector of Pewsey, in Wiltshire, who had preached at the opening of Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Bath, in 1765, the whole family party at Aberford made an excursion to Haworth. Grimshaw, the brave-hearted incumbent, to whom Yorkshire Methodism owes so much, had died four years before, and had been succeeded by the Rev. Mr. Richardson, a good man, and evangelical in his principles, but averse to open-air preaching, in which his predecessor had delighted. The intended visit to Haworth having become known, and it being understood that Fletcher and Mr. Townsend would preach, an immense multitude of people assembled to hear them. Application was made for the use of what was called "Mr. Whitefield's pulpit," that is, a scaffold erected by the side of Haworth church, and from which Whitefield was wont to thunder his overwhelming sermons. Mr. Richardson refused the request. Lady Huntingdon remonstrated; and, though it is not stated that the scaffold was brought out, it is known that both Fletcher and Townsend preached in the churchyard.

On leaving Aberford, the Countess and her friends proceeded to Kippax, on a visit to her niece, Mrs. Medhurst. Here, at the beginning of July, they were joined by the Rev. Martin Madan; and now the village of Kippax became the centre of some of the most remarkable evangelistic efforts recorded in Methodistic annals. For some weeks, Fletcher, of Madeley; Madan, from London; Venn, Vicar of Huddersfield; Conyers, Rector of Helmsley; Burnet, Vicar of Elland; Ryland, Curate of Huddersfield; Bentley, Vicar of Kippax; and Powley, Vicar of Dewsbury, made frequent excursions not only in the immediate neighbourhood of Kippax, but to distant parts of the county, affectionately inviting the multitudes who flocked to hear them to flee from the wrath to come.[1] Unfortunately, the details of these missionary labours seem to be irrecoverably lost; and it can only be added that, in consequence of being seized with a rather alarming illness, the Countess of Huntingdon was not able to take part in many of the services. After Fletcher's return to Madeley, he wrote to her ladyship as follows:—

"MY VERY DEAR AND HONOURED LADY,—The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who tried Israel, and led them through many a wandering to the good land—this faithful God has met with you; a *rod* is in His hand, but that hand bears so *deep* a print of love, that the design of His visitation cannot be mistaken. Nor does He come without the supporting *staff*. He kills to make alive. He wounds to heal. He afflicts to comfort, and to do it more deeply and effectually. My hearty prayer for your ladyship is, that you may drink the cup the Lord holds out to you as a new token of His unchangeable love. I call it unchangeable, because it is really so in its nature, though the appearances of it greatly vary for the trial of faith. 'I am God,' says He; 'I change not, therefore Israel is not consumed,' and Shadrach is kept in the burning fiery furnace.

"I have often heard your ladyship speak admirably upon knowing Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and *the fellowship of His sufferings*. The Lord will have you improve in that heavenly knowledge; therefore He gives you so long a lesson at this time. The lesson is hard, I grant; but the Master is *so loving*, the science so noble, and the scholar so used to severe exercises, that it is no wonder you are placed on the highest form. No cross—no crown! The heavier the cross, the brighter the crown!

"Till I received Lady Anne's letter, I often wanted to persuade myself that your ladyship had got quite well soon after I left Kippax. I beg my best respects and warmest thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Medhurst, Miss Medhurst, and the dear company of your ladyship. Their kindness and patience towards me while at Kippax have laid me under a heavy burden of obligations, which I desire gratefully to acknowledge.

"Through a mistake of our good friend Ireland, dear Mr. Glascott came here the day after I arrived from Yorkshire. He stayed only one day. This stripling will throw down Goliath. I blessed that cross and accident which brought me acquainted with a young soldier that made me so ashamed of myself. Mr. Hill[2] is gone to Brighton, where I hope he will be as useful as he is in Shropshire. Captain Scott set out last Monday for York, after making a great stir for good in Shrewsbury.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., pp. 290, 291.

[2] Afterwards Sir Richard Hill, Bart., one of Fletcher's antagonists in the Calvinian controversy.

"I am loth to trouble Lady Anne with a request of a line, to know how your ladyship does, yet I know not well how to give up the hope that she will once more steal two minutes for it.

"I am, with peculiar thanks to Lady Anne for her letter, and to your ladyship for numberless favours, my lady, your most indebted and obliged servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

No further reference to the illness of the Countess of Huntingdon is needed; but a few lines may be added concerning Mr. Glascott, whom Mr. Ireland had sent to Madeley to officiate during Fletcher's supposed absence. This young clergyman had been ordained at Oxford in 1765. For two years, he had served the curacy of Cheveley, in Berkshire, and had been recently dismissed. He was now introduced to Lady Huntingdon, became her assistant chaplain, and laboured in her connexion till 1781. Mr. Ireland then presented him to the vicarage of Hatherleigh, in Devonshire. Here he prayed and preached for nearly fifty years; and here he died, in the full triumph of the faith of Christ, on the 18th of August, 1830.[2]

For years past, Fletcher and Whitefield had been sympathizing and warm-hearted friends, but, up to the present, Whitefield had not been to Madeley. After Fletcher's departure from Yorkshire, Whitefield succeeded him in that county, and glorious were the seasons which Lady Huntingdon and the great evangelist enjoyed at Kippax, Huddersfield, Leeds, and other places. Fletcher urged Whitefield to call at Madeley on his way to what he called his "winter quarters" in London; but Whitefield found it impracticable to comply with his friend's request.[3] Thus was lost an opportunity that did not recur. Whitefield never preached in Madeley church. He died in 1770.

The Countess of Huntingdon spent the winter of 1767 chiefly at Bath, and was in constant correspondence with Fletcher concerning her college at Trevecca. Her proposal was to admit no young men except such as were truly converted to God, and resolved to dedicate themselves to His service. All admitted might stay three years, and be clothed, boarded, lodged, and educated gratuitously. Afterwards, those who desired it might enter the Christian ministry, either in the Church of England or among Protestants of any other denomination. The scheme was generous, and as free from bigotry as it could be. Her ladyship had to select first of all a president, and her choice fell upon Fletcher. He accepted her invitation. It was impossible that he should be generally resident at Trevecca, much less constantly; his duty to his Madeley parishioners would not admit of this; but he promised to attend as often as he conveniently could; to give advice respecting the appointment of masters and the admission of students; to revise the studies and conduct of the latter, and to assist their piety, and judge of their qualifications for the work of the ministry. All this was to be done without any fee or reward whatever.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 296.
[2] *Ibid*, vol. ii., p. 464.
[3] *Ibid*, vol. i., p. 299.

The plan for the examination of candidates for admission was drawn up by her ladyship. It was then submitted to Romaine, Venn, Wesley, and others, and received their approval. The Countess finally sent it to her president elect, who returned the following answer:—

"MADELEY, *November* 24, 1767.

"MY DEAR LADY,—I received the proposals which your ladyship has drawn up for the examination of the young men who may appear proper candidates for the Trevecca academy; and I gratefully acknowledge your kindness in allowing me to propose suitable young men resident in my parish.

"Our Israel is small, my lady, and if among six hundred thousand only two faithful men were found of old, the Joshuas and Calebs cannot be numerous among us. After having perused the articles, and looked round about me, I designed to answer your ladyship, '*Out of this Galilee ariseth no prophet.*' With this resolution I went to bed, but, in my sleep, was much taken up with the thought and remembrance of one of my young colliers, who told me, some months ago, that for four years he had been inwardly persuaded he should be called to speak for God. I looked upon the unusual impression of my dream as a call to speak to the young man, and at waking desired to do so at the first opportunity. To my great surprise, he came to Madeley that very morning, and I found upon enquiry that he had been as much drawn to come as I to speak to him. This encouraged me to speak of your ladyship's design, and I was satisfied by his conversation that I might venture to propose him to your ladyship for further examination.

"His name is *James Glazebrook*, collier and getter of ironstone in

Madeley wood. He is now twenty-three—by look nineteen. He has been awakened seven years. He has been steady from the beginning of his profession, at least so far as to be kept outwardly unblameable, but has seemed to me to walk mostly in heaviness. What I told him was as oil put into a glimmering lamp, and he seems to revive upon hearing of the little outward call. Notwithstanding his strong desire to exhort, he has not yet attempted to do so; and his not being forward to run of himself, makes me have the better hope his call is from God. He has no mean gift in singing and prayer. His judgment and sense are superior to his station, and he does not seem to be discouraged by the severest part of your ladyship's proposals. One difficulty stood in the way. He maintains by his labour his aged mother; but this is made easy by his mother's leave, and the promise of an elder son to maintain her if he can have his brother's place in the pit.

"With regard to the superintendency of the college, or the examination of the candidates, I know myself too well to dream about it; nevertheless, so far as my present calling and poor abilities will allow, I am ready to throw my mite into the treasury.

"Some of our conversations upon the manifestations of the Son of Man to the heart have led me into many an hour's consideration. The Holy Ghost alone can clear up the points to pursue. Nevertheless, I have found both comfort and profit in setting upon paper the reflections I have been enabled to make upon the mysterious subject; and they have, through mercy, set my soul more than ever against the rampant errors of Sandemanianism. Should Providence ever favour me with an opportunity, I would bespeak an hour of your ladyship's time to ratify my views of the point, under God.

"I am happily provided with a schoolmaster to my mind, and my ministry is the last under which I would advise any one intended for a preacher to sit. Nevertheless, if the young candidate, (Mr. Eastwood) mentioned in the letter, wants retirement and a prophet's room at my house he may have it, if he can cook for himself or find a table in the neighbourhood."[1]

There is only one other incident, in the life of Fletcher, deserving attention and belonging to the year 1767; and as it can be summarily dispatched, it may be best to mention it at once, before returning to two matters in his letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, which will require more extended notice.

On December 1, the tenth Earl of Buchan died at Bath, and was succeeded by his son, who appointed Fletcher, Venn, and Berridge to be his chaplains. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, referring to the appointment, Fletcher wrote:—

"I have just received a letter from Lord Buchan, in which he says, 'Pray for me, that I also may be found faithful when our Master calls for me, and that I may live a martyr to redeeming love, and die a trophy and a monument of the reality of the despised influences of the Holy Ghost.' It is a singular honour to belong to so excellent a nobleman. Oh! how far below his grace is his nobility! I feel a strong desire to pray that he may be kept from the fickleness of youth[1] and the baits of ambition. I share in the happiness of Lady Buchan and Lady Anne Erskine upon the occasion. May God make them, together with your ladyship, a fourfold cord to draw sinners unto Jesus."[2]

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 82.

Fletcher evidently was pleased with his appointment. The emoluments of his new office probably were small, perhaps *nil;* but, by means of it, he became associated with one of the most pious and exemplary noblemen of the day.

To recur to Fletcher's former letter to the Countess of Huntingdon.

He nominated James Glazebrook as a fitting candidate to be examined for admission into Lady Huntingdon's intended college. As already stated, Glazebrook was a poor, hard-working collier. He was without money and without learning; but he had two of the three things by which Wesley tested the Divine call of his itinerants to preach; namely, "*grace*" and "*gifts;*" and Fletcher had no doubt that when the opportunity arrived, he would have the third—"*fruit.*" Wesley's own definitions of these three words were:—

> "*Grace:* a knowledge of God as a pardoning God; the love of God abiding in them; desiring and seeking nothing but God; and the being holy in all manner of conversation. *Gifts:* in some tolerable degree a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith; and a degree of utterance so as to be able to speak justly, readily, clearly. *Fruit:* are any truly convinced of sin and converted to God by their preaching? As long as these three marks concur in any, we believe he is called of God to preach."

Whether Fletcher adopted Wesley's threefold test, and applied it to James Glazebrook, it is impossible to ascertain; but that his opinion of the young man was correct, subsequent events fully proved. Glazebrook was one of Fletcher's converts. He was one of the first students at Trevecca college, if not *the very first.* There he distinguished himself equally by his superior abilities and his uncommon diligence. He allowed himself but little time for refreshment, rest, or recreation. His piety was as remarkable as his gifts and diligence. He was soon sent forth to preach, and his labours were attended with considerable success. For three years, he was thus employed in various parts of England. He then tired of the itinerant life, and desired the Countess of Huntingdon to procure him orders in the Established Church. With the assistance of Fletcher a title was obtained, and Glazebrook was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Lichfield, in December 1771. Soon after his ordination, he entered on the curacy of Smisby, in Derbyshire; after which he served the curacies of Rowley Regis, near Birmingham; Shawbury, Shropshire; Ravenstone, in Derbyshire; and Hugglescote, in Leicestershire. In 1777, he was ordained priest by Dr. Hurd, Bishop of Worcester. Two years later, he married the eldest daughter of Thomas Kirkland, Esq., M.D., of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, an intimate friend of the Countess of Huntingdon; and, soon after his marriage, became minister of St. James's, Warrington. Ultimately, Lord Moira presented him to the vicarage of Belton, a village in Leicestershire, whose living even now is not worth more than about £180 a year. Here he continued till the time of his decease; and here, as well as at Warrington and other places, he was made the honoured instrument of "turning many to righteousness." Besides his ministerial labours, he wrote and published a "Treatise on Extemporary Preaching," "Letters on Infant Baptism," an "Answer to Gilbert Wakefield's Treatise on Baptism," and, after his death, his family published a volume of his sermons, which was well received by the public. Such, in brief, was the history of Fletcher's convert and *protegé*. Further particulars concerning him may be found in the *Evangelical Register* for 1836.

---

[1] The new earl was only twenty-four years of age.
[2] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 19.

The other matter, requiring attention, in Fletcher's letter to Lady Huntingdon, under the date of November 24, 1767, is his reference to the conversations he had had with her ladyship upon the "Manifestations of the Son of Man to the heart," and the fact that he had devoutly studied this mysterious subject for "many hours," and had put his thoughts "upon paper." This important manuscript was not published until after Fletcher's death. The editor of his collected works, in a brief preface, says :—

> "For the Letters on the Manifestation of Christ, the reader is obliged to Mrs. Fletcher. When they were written, or to whom they are addressed, is uncertain; but, from the beginning of the first letter, the decayed state of the manuscript, and the extreme smallness of the character, which could scarcely have been legible to the author in his latter years, they are supposed to have been the first essay of a genius afterwards so much admired. The reader is requested to remember that the pious author wrote only for himself and his friends; that these sheets want his perfecting hand; and that the editor thought himself entitled to take no liberties."

From this preface, it is evident that the editor was not acquainted with the foregoing letter to the Countess of Huntingdon; and it may be added, that there is no need for the apology, that the "sheets want" Fletcher's "perfecting hand."

The Letters are six in number, and fill fifty-three octavo pages in Fletcher's collected works.[1] It is extremely difficult to give, in a brief form, the substance of these important papers; and yet the task must be attempted, because the subject is one of great interest, and because the Letters seem to have been among the earliest of his compositions, that were afterwards published.

His object is clearly stated in his opening paragraph :—

> "When I had the pleasure of seeing you last, you seemed surprised to hear me say, that the Son of God, for purposes worthy of His wisdom, manifests Himself, sooner or later, to all His sincere followers, in a spiritual manner, which the world knows not of. The assertion appeared to you unscriptural, enthusiastical, and dangerous. What I then advanced to prove that it was scriptural, rational, and of the greatest importance, made you desire I would write you on the mysterious subject. I declined it, as being unequal to the task; but, having since considered that a mistake here may endanger your soul or mine, I sit down to comply with your request; and the end I propose by it is, either to give you a fair opportunity of pointing out my error, if I am wrong, or to engage you, if I am right, to seek what I esteem the most invaluable of all blessings,—revelations of Christ to your own soul, produc-

---

[1] They were first published by the Rev. Melville Horne, in 1791, with the title, "Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son of God."

tive of the experimental knowledge of Him, and the present enjoyment of His salvation."

"I shall not be able to establish the doctrine I maintain unless you allow me the existence of the proper senses, to which our Lord manifests Himself. The manifestation I contend for being of a spiritual nature, must be made to spiritual senses; and that such senses exist, and are opened in, and exercised by, regenerate souls, is what I design to prove in this letter" (the first), "by the joint testimony of Scripture, our Church, and reason."

In his second letter, Fletcher defines what he means, and does not mean, by the manifestations of the Son of God to the soul of man. In the third and fourth, he dwells on the uses of such manifestations. The fifth contains a summary of the numerous appearances of the Son of God during the Old Testament dispensation, and concludes with answers to the objection that these appearances proved "only, that God favoured the patriarchs and Jews with immediate revelations of Himself, because they had neither the Gospel nor the Scriptures." Fletcher's fourth answer to this objection is so characteristic that it must be quoted :—

"If, because we have the letter of Scripture, we must be deprived of all immediate manifestations of Christ and His spirit, we are great losers by that blessed book, and we might reasonably say, 'Lord, bring us back to the dispensation of Moses! Thy Jewish servants could formerly converse with Thee face to face; but now we can know nothing of Thee, but by their writings. They viewed Thy glory in various wonderful appearances; but we are indulged only with black lines telling us of Thy glory. They had the bright Shekinah, and we have only obscure descriptions of it. They were blessed with lively oracles; and we only with a dead letter. The ark of Thy covenant went before them, and struck terror into all their adversaries; but a book, of which our enemies make daily sport, is the only revelation of Thy power among us. They made their boast of Urim and Thummim, and received particular, immediate answers from between the cherubim; but we have only general ones, by means of Hebrew and Greek writings, which many do not understand. They conversed familiarly with Moses their mediator, with Aaron their high priest, and with Samuel their prophet; these holy men gave them unerring directions in doubtful cases; but, alas! the apostles and inspired men are all dead; and Thou, Jesus, our Mediator, Priest, and Prophet, canst not be consulted to any purpose, for Thou manifestest Thyself no more. As for Thy sacred book, Thou knowest that sometimes the want of money to purchase it, the want of learning to consult the original, the want of wisdom to understand the translation, the want of skill or sight to read it, prevent our improving it to the best advantage, and keep some from reaping any benefit from it at all. O Lord! if, because we have this blessed picture of Thee, we must have no discovery of the glorious original, have compassion on us, take back Thy precious book, and impart Thy more precious Self to us, as Thou didst to Thy ancient people!"

In his sixth and last Letter, Fletcher proves "that the New Testament, as well as the Old, abounds with accounts of particular revelations of the Son of God;" and he concludes thus:—

"Having thus led you from Genesis to Revelation, I conclude by two inferences, which appear to me undeniable. The first, that it is evident our Lord, before His incarnation, during His stay on earth, and after His ascension into heaven, hath been pleased, in a variety of manners, to manifest Himself to the children of men, both for the benefit of the Church in general, and for the conversion of sinners and the establishment of saints in particular. Secondly, that the doctrine, which I maintain, is as old as Adam, as modern as St. John, the last of the inspired writers, and as scriptural as the Old and New Testaments, which is what I wanted to demonstrate."

This is an imperfect outline of Fletcher's production, but want of space prevents enlargement. Some, with a scornful jeer, will brand Fletcher as a mystic; and others, sincerely in search of truth, but who have not experienced that of which he speaks, will ask his meaning. Leaving the former to their own infidel or pharisaic wisdom, it may be said in reply to the latter, Fletcher meant nothing more than what Christ Himself meant in His sixth beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see God;*" and again, in one of His latest utterances, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest Myself to him.*" Or, again, Fletcher meant what St. Paul meant in texts like the following:— "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

If it be asked, again, what is the meaning of these and such like texts? it may be answered, substantially,—the meaning is the same as what is meant by stanzas like the following, written by John or Charles Wesley, and selected from their Hymn Book, almost at random:—

"Spirit of faith, come down,
  Reveal the things of God;
And make to us the Godhead known,
  And witness with the blood.
O that the world might know
  The all-atoning Lamb!
Spirit of faith! descend and show
  The virtue of His name."

"Come, Holy Ghost, (for moved by Thee
  The prophets wrote and spoke),
Unlock the truth, Thyself the key,
  Unseal the sacred Book.
Expand Thy wings, celestial Dove,
  Brood o'er our nature's night;
Oh, our disordered spirits move,
  And let there now be light.
God, through Himself, we then shall know,
  If Thou within us shine;
And sound, with all Thy saints below,
  The depths of love divine."

"Author of faith, eternal word,
  Whose spirit breathes the active flame;
Faith, like its finisher and Lord,
  To-day, as yesterday, the same:
To Thee our humble hearts aspire,
  And ask the gift unspeakable:
Increase in us the kindled fire,
  In us the work of faith fulfil.
The things unknown to feeble sense,
  Unseen by reason's glimmering ray,
With strong, commanding evidence,
  Their heavenly origin display.
Faith lends its realizing light,
  The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The Invisible appears in sight,
  And God is seen by mortal eye."

"O disclose Thy lovely face,
  Quicken all my drooping powers;
Gasps my fainting soul for grace,
  As a thirsty land for showers;

Haste, my Lord, no more delay!
  Come, my Saviour, come away!
Dark and cheerless is the morn,
  Unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
  Till Thy mercy's beams I see;
Till Thou inward light impart,
  Glad my eyes and warm my heart.
Visit, then, this soul of mine,
  Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiancy Divine,
  Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display,
  Shining to the perfect day."

If it be asked, again, what means all this? let the enquirer carefully and devoutly read Fletcher's Six Letters. He will be wiser and better for his exercise; and will ascertain that Fletcher and Wesley were not, in the vulgar sense of the expression, bewildered and bewildering mystics, but spiritually enlightened, sober, scriptural divines, who, with reverential and joyous hearts, could sing:—

"What we have felt and seen,
  With confidence we tell;
And publish to the sons of men
  The signs infallible.
We by His Spirit prove
  And know the things of God,
The things, which freely of His love
  He hath on us bestow'd.
His glory our design,
  We live our God to please;
And rise, with filial fear divine
  To perfect holiness."

CHAPTER VII.

TREVECCA COLLEGE: VISIT TO SWITZERLAND, ETC.

FROM JANUARY 3, 1768, TO JULY 1770.

IN Fletcher's letter to Lady Huntingdon, dated November 24, 1767, it is intimated that the Countess had suggested to Fletcher that a certain "Mr. Eastwood" could serve him as his village schoolmaster, and was anxious to do so, in order to have the benefit of Fletcher's ministry. There can be no doubt that the name "Eastwood" is a mistake, and that "Easterbrook" was meant.

Joseph Easterbrook was a son of the bell-man of Bristol, and had been educated at Wesley's Kingswood School.[1] He was now about seventeen years of age, and came to reside at Madeley.[2] Afterwards he obtained episcopal ordination, and became Vicar of the Temple Church, Bristol, and Ordinary of Newgate Prison in that city. He continued faithful to Wesley and to Methodism; and, it is said, he preached a sermon in every house in his large parish. He died in 1791, in the fortieth year of his age. This is not the place to give further details of his history; but it is hoped that those now related will add to the interest of what Fletcher writes concerning him in the following letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, in reply to one she had addressed to him respecting suitable books for the students of her intended college :—

---

[1] "Unpublished Letter by John Pawson."

[2] Misled by the author of the "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," I have stated in my "Life and Times of Wesley," that at the opening of Trevecca College, Easterbrook was appointed to the office of master. This is a mistake. The master, as will be seen in succeeding pages, was a wonderful child, twelve years old! Perhaps however, Easterbrook rendered some assistance.—L. T.

"MADELEY, *January* 3, 1768.

"MY LADY,—I thank your ladyship for having recommended to me Easterbrook. I hope he will be the captain of the school, and a great help to the master, as well as a spur to the students. He has good parts, a most happy memory, and a zeal that would gladden your ladyship's heart. He has preached no less than four times to-day; and seems, indeed, in his own element when he is seeking after the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He is employed every evening in the work of the Lord; and I give him the more opportunity to exercise his talent, as it appears he does it far better than I. I beg two things for him: first, that it may hold; secondly, that he may be kept humble. He would at first live upon potatoes and water; but, finding it may impair his health, I have got him to table with me, and shall gladly pay his board. He works for me, and the workman is worthy of his hire.

"Our young collier" (Glazebrook) "seems a little discouraged with regard to the hope of his being admitted one of your students. He thinks he stands no chance, if all must be qualified as he" (Easterbrook) "is.

"With regard to books, I am in doubt what to write your ladyship. Having studied abroad, and used rather foreign than English books with my pupils" (Mr. Hill's sons), "I am not well enough acquainted with the books Great Britain affords to select the *best* and most *concise*. Besides, a plan of studies must be fixed upon first, before proper books can be chosen. Grammar, logic, rhetoric, ecclesiastical history, and a little natural philosophy and geography, with a great deal of practical divinity, will be sufficient for those who do not care to dive into languages. Mr. Townsend and Charles Wesley might, by spending an hour or two together, make a proper choice; and I would recommend them not to forget Watt's 'Logic,' and his 'History of the Bible, by Questions and Answers,' which seem to me excellent books of the kind for clearness and order. Mr. Wesley's 'Natural Philosophy' contains as much as is wanted, or more. Mason's 'Essay on Pronunciation' will be worth their attention. 'Henry and Gill on the Bible,' with the four volumes of Baxter's 'Practical Works,' Keach's 'Metaphors,' 'Taylor on the Types,' Gurnal's 'Christian Armour,' 'Edwards on Preaching,' Johnson's English Dictionary, and Mr. Wesley's 'Christian Library,' may make part of the little library. The book of Baxter, I mention, I shall take care to send to Trevecca, as a mite towards the collection, together with Usher's 'Body of Divinity,' Scapula's Greek Lexicon, and Littleton's Latin Dictionary.

"With regard to those who propose to learn Latin and Greek, the master your ladyship will appoint may choose to follow his particular method. Mr. Wesley's books, printed for the use of Christian youths, seem to me short and proper, and their expense less, which, I suppose, should be consulted. Two or three dictionaries of Bailey or Dyke for those who learn English, with two or three Coles's Dictionaries, Shrevelins's, and Pasor's, for those who will learn Latin and Greek, may be a sufficient stock at first.

"Mr. Edward Stillingfleet[1] is presented, by Mr. Hill, to the living of Shawbury, eight miles from Shrewsbury, and twenty from here. I thank the Lord for this fellow-helper.

"I am, your ladyship's unworthy servant,
"J. FLETCHER."[2]

The reader may learn two facts from Fletcher's letter. First, what were the books in divinity he most loved and prized. It is to be feared that such books are no longer popular. In the case of many theological students, they have given place to the flimsy and even sceptical productions of a later period. The more the pity. No wonder that so many pulpits are spiritless, and that so many pews are starved.

Secondly: It is also evident that Fletcher had already formed a sort of circuit of preaching places, otherwise a youth like Easterbrook could hardly have found the opportunity to preach every evening in the week, and four times on Sunday. It is now impossible to ascertain what the places were; but Wesley's testimony may here be appropriately introduced.

> "From the beginning, Mr. Fletcher did not confine his labours to his own parish. For many years, he regularly preached at places, eight, ten, or sixteen miles off, returning the same night, though he seldom got home before one or two in the morning. At a little Society which he had gathered about six miles from Madeley, he preached two or three times a week, beginning at five in the morning."[3]

Of course, all this was ecclesiastically irregular, and a repetition of it would not be permitted now; but, fortunately for the people who "sat in darkness," it was, except in a few instances, only a peccadillo a hundred years ago, at which bishops, priests, and deacons found it a convenience to themselves to wink.

---

[1] A great-grandson of the celebrated bishop of that name. He proved himself to be a faithful friend to Venn, and the other evangelical clergymen of the age.

[2] *Methodist Magazine*, 1821, p. 437.

[3] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

It was at this time that Wesley wrote to Fletcher his unusually long and well-known letter on conversation. The following are brief extracts from it :—

"BIRMINGHAM, *March* 20, 1768.

"DEAR SIR,—Mr. Easterbrook told me yesterday that you are sick of the conversation even of them who profess religion,—that you find it quite unprofitable, if not hurtful, to converse with them three or four hours together, and are sometimes almost determined to shut yourself up, as the less evil of the two.

"I do not wonder at it at all, especially considering with whom you have chiefly conversed for some time past, namely, the hearers of Mr. Madan, or Mr. Bourian, perhaps I might add, of Mr. Whitefield. The conversing with these I have rarely found to be profitable to my soul. Rather it has damped my designs; it has cooled my resolutions; and I have consciously left them with a dry, dissipated spirit.

"Again; you have, for some time, conversed a good deal with the genteel Methodists. Now it matters not a straw what doctrine they hear,—whether they frequent the Lock or West Street,—they are, almost all, salt which has lost its savour, if ever they had any. They are thoroughly conformed to the maxims, the spirit, the fashions, and customs of the world.

"But were these or those of ever so excellent a spirit, you conversed with them too long. One had need to be an angel, not a man, to converse three or four hours at once, to any purpose.

"But have you not a remedy for all this in your hands? In order to truly profitable conversation, may you not select persons clear of both Calvinism and Antinomianism? not fond of that luscious way of talking, but standing in awe of Him they love; who are vigorously working out their salvation, and are athirst for full redemption, and every moment expecting it, if not already enjoying it?"[1]

Apart from the subject of this letter, it is of importance, as showing that the maelstrom of the Calvinian controversy was already stirring, and that Wesley was afraid of Fletcher being drawn into it. This would be much more apparent could the letter be quoted here *in extenso.* Suffice it to add, that Fletcher was preserved from the spreading evils, and that it is difficult to tell how much he was indebted to Wesley's long warning letter for his escape from danger.

So far as Fletcher was concerned, the great event of the year 1768 was the opening of Lady Huntingdon's College at Trevecca. Wesley seemed to disapprove of her ladyship's design. In a letter to his brother Charles, he wrote :—

---

[1] Tyerman's "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. iii., p. 4.

> "Edinburgh, May 14, 1768.—I am glad Mr. Fletcher has been with you. But, if the tutor fails, what will become of our College at Trevecca? Did you ever see anything more queer than their plan of institution? Pray, who penned it, man or woman? I am afraid the Visitor" (Fletcher) "too will fail."[1]

Meanwhile, however, an occurrence had taken place, which appeared to make the opening of Trevecca College increasingly desirable and important. On the 12th of March, six students belonging to Edmund Hall, Oxford, were expelled the University, really and truly on the ground that they were charged with being Methodists. The event, as may easily be imagined, created a national sensation. Numbers of tracts and pamphlets, *pro et con*, were published; and, among others, one by Whitefield, entitled, "A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Durell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford; occasioned by a late Expulsion of Six Students from Edmund Hall." Whitefield's letter was dated April 12, 1768, exactly a month after the expulsions took place. Fletcher read it with approbation, and wrote to Whitefield, thanking him for the service he had rendered to the cause of truth; and also referring to a recent visit to Bristol, to the Rev. Cradock Glascott, who had supplied for him at Madeley; and to the prospect there was of obtaining a suitable master, from Suffolk, for the College at Trevecca. Fletcher's letter was as follows :—

"MADELEY, *May* 28, 1768.

"REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—I thank you, though late, for the kind leave you gave me of trying to pipe where you trumpet the name of our dear Redeemer, in Bristol. I ask you, and my hearers there, and, above all, our gracious Lord, to pardon me for the wretched manner in which I performed, or rather spoiled, the glorious work.

"I thank you, also, for your letter to the Vice-Chancellor. Mr. Talbot[2] treated us with the reading of it at our meeting of the clergy at Birmingham; and I saw applause and satisfaction sitting upon every brow.

"Lady Huntingdon, in a few lines I had lately, mentions that Providence raises a master for her school from Suffolk, who promises well. She desires he may be secured, if approved of. Perhaps you know him; and you are the best judge whether he is likely to answer. For my part, I am willing to put my smoking flax to the tapers of my brethren and fathers, when they endeavour to throw some light and order upon her ladyship's design; but I feel my place should be among the scholars, rather than among the Directors.

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 126.

[2] No doubt, the Rev. William Talbot, LL.D., Vicar of Kineton, in Warwickshire.

"Mr. Glascott quitted himself as a faithful and able minister, during his stay here. Thousands attended him in the next parish, where he nobly took the field. Nevertheless, I see a curse of barrenness upon this neighbourhood, which makes me groan for a day of Pentecost. God hasten it in His time! You will please to remember that you are a debtor to our barbarians, as well as to the Greeks in London. When you come, my pulpit will be honoured, greatly honoured, to hold you, if my church cannot hold your congregation."[1]

Who "the master from Suffolk" was, has never yet been stated. The matter is of little consequence. In the month of July, Wesley visited Fletcher, and, no doubt, they conversed concerning the College at Trevecca; but Wesley's account of his visit is so brief as to be almost significant that there was something in their interview that he would rather suppress than publish. He simply writes: "1768, Sunday, July 31. I preached for Mr. Fletcher in the morning; and in the evening at Shrewsbury."[2] Within a month after this, the college was opened; but, instead of being at Trevecca, Wesley was in Cornwall.

The opening took place on Wednesday, August 24, the anniversary of the birthday of Lady Huntingdon. In all likelihood, Fletcher, the president, was present; but no positive evidence of this has been published. Indeed, considering the importance of the event, the account of it is remarkably brief. The best, in fact, so far as I know, the only one ever given to the public, is an extract from Whitefield's Memorandum Book, as follows:—

"August 24, 1768. Opened good Lady Huntingdon's Chapel and College, in the parish of Talgarth, Brecknockshire, South Wales. Preached from Exodus xx. 24: 'In all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.' August 25.—Gave an exhortation to the Students, in the College-chapel, from Luke i. 15:

---

[1] Fletcher's Works, vol. viii., p. 255.
[2] Wesley's Journal.

'He shall be great in the sight of the Lord.' Sunday, August 28.—Preached in the court before the College (the congregation consisting of some thousands), from 1 Cor. iii. 11: 'Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'"[1]

To this must be added a single sentence, from a letter which Whitefield wrote to Mr. Keene, on August 30: "What we have seen and felt at the College is unspeakable."[2]

That is all. Is there an instance of any other Methodist Institution so important as this, the published details of whose opening services are so pitiably meagre?

It has been said, there is no *positive* proof that Fletcher was at the opening of Trevecca College; but there is *incidental* evidence that he was, and that his friend James Ireland, Esq., was with him. This will be found in the *second* of the following letters addressed to Mr. Ireland and his dying daughter.

"MADELEY, *July* 30, 1768.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Uncertain as I am whether your daughter is yet alive, I know not what to say, but this,—our Heavenly Father appoints all things for the best. If her days of suffering are prolonged, it is to honour her with a conformity to the crucified Jesus. If they are shortened, she will have drunk all her cup of affliction, and found, at the bottom of it, not the bitterness of her sins, but the consolations of our Saviour's Spirit.

"I had lately some views of death, and it appeared to me in the most brilliant colours. What is it to die, but to open our eyes after the disagreeable dream of life? It is to break the prison of corruptible flesh and blood, into which sin has cast us. It is to draw aside the curtain which prevents us seeing the Supreme Beauty and Goodness face to face. O my dear friend, how lovely is death, when we look at it in Jesus Christ! To die is one of the greatest privileges of the Christian.

---

[1] Gillies' "Life of Whitefield."

[2] Trevecca College was supported at the sole expense of the Countess of Huntingdon till her death, on June 17, 1791. "Had her ability been equal to her desire for its continuance, she would have endowed it, and thereby have provided for its perpetuity." About four years before her decease, and with her full approval, provision was made for the future. Seven trustees were appointed to take care of the College after her ladyship's death; and a subscription was begun for its maintenance. This accumulated fund, in 1791, amounted to £585, 3 per cent. Consols. The lease of the Trevecca property had expired, and it was now determined to remove the college to Cheshunt, near London. Accordingly, the Trevecca house was given up at Lady-day, 1792; the furniture, the library, and the communion plate were taken to Cheshunt, where the new establishment was formally opened on August 24, the anniversary of the commencement of the abandoned one at Trevecca. A religious service, of nearly three hours and a-half's duration, was held; Lady Anne Agnes Erskine, executrix of the Countess of Huntingdon, presided; and seven or eight hundred persons were present. ("The Order observed at the opening of the Countess of Huntingdon's College at Cheshunt, London, 1792," 8vo., 86 pp.)

"If Miss Ireland is still living, tell her, a thousand times, that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; that He has vanquished and disarmed death; that He has brought life and immortality to light; and that all things are ours, whether life or death, eternity or time. These are great truths upon which she ought to repose her soul with full assurance. Everything is shadow, in comparison of the reality of the Gospel. If your daughter be dead, believe in Jesus, and you shall find her again in Him, who fills all in all, who encircles the material and spiritual world in His arms—in the immense bosom of His Divinity.

"Adieu, my dear friend. Yours,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

"MADELEY, *October* 14, 1768.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I think I told you at Trevecca,[2] that we had no farmers at Madeley who feared God and loved Jesus. This generation among us are buried in the furrows of their ploughs, or under the heaps of corn which fill their granaries. Now that I am on the spot, I do not see one who makes it necessary for me to change my opinion. Your bailiff cannot come from this Nazareth.

"If the last efforts of the physicians fail with respect to Miss Ireland, it will be a consolation to you to know that they have been tried. Every thing dies. Things visible are all transitory; but invisible ones abide for ever. If Christ is our life and our resurrection, it is of little importance whether we die now, or thirty years hence.

"Present my respects to your son, and tell him, that last week I buried three young persons who had died of a malignant fever; and who, on the second day of their illness, were deprived of their speech and senses, and, on the fifth, of their lives. Of what avail are youth and vigour when the Lord lifts His finger? And shall we sin against the eternal power, the infinite love, the inexorable justice, and the immense goodness of this God, who gives us, from moment to moment, the breath which is in our nostrils? No—we will employ the precious gift in praising and blessing this good God, who is our Father in Jesus Christ.

"I hope you learn, as well as I, and better than I, to know Jesus in the Spirit. I have known Him after the flesh, and after the letter; I strive to know Him in the power of His Spirit. Under the Divine character of a quickening Spirit, He is everywhere. All that live, live in Him, and they who are spiritually alive have a double life. The Lord give us this second life more abundantly. Yours,

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 198.

[2] In all probability at the opening of the College on August 24.

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The next is an extract from a long letter, addressed to dying Miss Ireland.

"MADELEY, *December* 5, 1768.

"MY DEAR AFFLICTED FRIEND,—I hear you are returned from the last journey you took in search of health. Your Heavenly Father sees fit to deny it you, not because He hateth you (*for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth*), but because life and health might be fatal snares to your soul, out of which you could not escape, but by tedious illness, and an early death.

"Your father has crossed the sea for you; Jesus has done more. He has crossed the abyss that lies between heaven and earth—between the Creator and the creature. He has waded through the sea of His tears, blood, and agonies, not to take you to the physician at Montpelier, but to become your physician and Saviour Himself. Oh, my friend, delay not cheerfully to surrender yourself to Him. Look not at your sins without beholding His blood and righteousness. Eye not death but to behold your gracious Saviour, saying, '*Fear not, O thou of little faith: wherefore dost thou doubt?*' Consider not eternity but as the palace where you are going to enter with the Bridegroom of souls, and rest from all your sins and miseries. View not the condemning law of God but as made honourable by Him, who was made a curse for you. If you have no comfort, distrust not Jesus on that account; on the contrary, take advantage from it to give greater glory to God, by believing, as Abraham did, 'in hope against hope.' In this simple, Gospel way, wait the Lord's leisure, and He will comfort your heart.

"I hope you take care to have little or nothing else mentioned to you but His praises and promises. Your tongue and ears are going to be silent in the grave. Now, or never, you must use them to hear and speak good of His name. Comfort your weeping friends. Reprove the backsliders. Encourage seekers. Remember the praying, believing, preaching, though dying thief. Be not afraid to drop a word for Him who opens a fountain of blood for you. Suffer, live, die at His feet; and you will soon revive, sing, and reign in His bosom for evermore. Farewell, in the Conqueror of Death and Prince of Life.

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

Within three months after the date of this letter, Miss Ireland had left a world of sin and suffering, and had entered into that rest which remains for the people of God.[1] Hence the following, addressed to her father :—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 199.
[2] *Ibid*, 1791, p. 204.

"MADELEY, *March* 26, 1769.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—The Lord is desirous of making you a true disciple of His dear Son, the '*Man of Sorrows*,' by sending you affliction upon affliction. A sister and a wife who appear to hasten to the grave in which you have so lately laid your only daughter, places you in circumstances of uncommon sorrow. But in this see the finger of Him who works all in all, and who commands us to forsake all to follow Him. Believe in Him. Believe that He does all for the best; and that all shall work for good to those who love Him. His goodness to your daughter ought to encourage your faith and confidence for Mrs. Ireland. Offer her upon the altar, and you shall see that, if it be best for her and you, His grace will suspend the blow which threatens you.

"Your rich present of meal came last week, and shall be distributed to the pious poor agreeably to your orders. We are happy to receive your bounty, but you are more happy in bestowing it upon us. Witness the words of Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Nevertheless, receive, by faith, the presents of the Lord, the gifts of His Spirit, and reject not the bread which cometh down from heaven, because the Lord gives it you with so much love.

"I shall be obliged to go to Switzerland this year or the next, if I live and the Lord permits. I have there a brother, a worthy man, who threatens to leave his wife and children to come and pay me a visit if I do not go and see him myself. It is some time since our gracious God convinced him of sin, and I have some of his letters which give me great pleasure. This circumstance has more weight with me than the settlement of my affairs."[2]

Mr. Ireland was a frequent benefactor to Fletcher and the poor of Madeley. Hence, in another letter to the same friend in need, Fletcher wrote :—

"I think I wrote my last letter two days before I received your bounty —a large hogshead of rice and two cheeses. Accept the thanks of your poor and mine. I distributed your gifts on Shrove Tuesday; and preached to a numerous congregation on 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.' We prayed for our benefactor, that God would give him a hundredfold in this life, and eternal life, where life eternal will be no burden."[3]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 205.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 206.

[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

Help, like Mr. Ireland's, was always welcome. Many of Fletcher's parishioners were extremely poor, and to the utmost of his ability he contributed to their necessities. One who knew him writes:—

> "The profusion of his charity toward the poor and needy is scarcely credible. It constantly exhausted his purse; it frequently unfurnished his home; and sometimes left him destitute of the common necessaries of life. That he might feed the hungry, he led a life of abstinence and self-denial; and that he might cover the naked, he clothed himself in the most homely attire."[1]

Fletcher was President, or, as Wesley chose to call him more correctly, *Visitor* of Trevecca College. The office brought upon him considerable anxiety and labour. In the summer of 1769, John Jones made application to be appointed head master. Mr. Jones, from 1746 to 1767, had been one of Wesley's itinerant preachers. He was one of the first classical masters of Kingswood School, and wrote the Latin Grammar which was used in that academy.[2] He was highly esteemed by Wesley, and after he left Kingswood was generally stationed in Wesley's two most important circuits, London and Bristol. In 1754, when there was great excitement respecting a possible separation of the Methodists from the Church of England, Charles Wesley wished what he called "*the sound preachers*" to be "*qualified for orders*," and wrote to his brother, saying, "I know none fitter for training up the young men in learning than yourself or J. Jones." Nine years after this, when Erasmus, a bishop of the Greek Church, visited London, he, at Wesley's request, ordained Jones to assist the Arch-Methodist in administering the sacraments to his Societies. Charles Wesley would not admit the validity of this ordination, and consequently would not allow Mr. Jones to officiate as a clergyman. This was a severe trial to the newly-ordained preacher, and led him to leave the Methodists. He afterwards procured ordination from the Bishop of London, and was presented to the living of Harwich, where he continued to preach for many years, and where he ended his days in peace.[1] He never lost his love for Wesley. In 1775, when Wesley was dangerously ill in Ireland, he wrote to him from Harwich :—

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Myles's "Chronological History of the Methodists."

> "I cannot express what I felt when I was informed you were both senseless and speechless; and it was like life from the dead when I heard you were out of danger and able to sit up. Time was when you would have taken my advice, at least in some things. Let me entreat, let me beseech you, to preach less frequently, and that only at the principal places," etc.[3]

Such was John Jones, Wesley's friend, and at one time held in high esteem by Wesley's brother Charles. His ambition to be employed in Lady Huntingdon's college at Trevecca was not inordinate. Fifteen years before, Charles Wesley had thought him qualified to train young men for the ministry, and from one of his letters, written in 1777, and published in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1837, it is evident that Charles Wesley's opinion was well founded. The letter was addressed to a gentleman of Magdalene College, Cambridge, who was about to be ordained, and wished Mr. Jones's advice respecting the composition of sermons and preaching them.

> "Prayer," said he, "should always precede the composing of a discourse. In general, the explication of the text or context, if they need it, should not be too short. The propositions or doctrines should not be too long nor too many, and the clearer they are the better. The illustrations should be proper and lively; the proofs close and home; the motives strong and cogent; the inferences and application natural, and not laboured. For if we cannot persuade the passions, we shall go but a little way with most of our hearers. This was George Whitefield's peculiar talent; but I do not mean to persuade you to bawl as loud as he did, and yet I would advise you to raise your voice in the application of your discourse. Eight-and-thirty years ago I thought it an easy matter to prove most points in divinity. I have been learning the contrary ever since, and I find it now very difficult, by Scriptures properly understood and applied, to prove many things which I once thought quite clear. I find it necessary to understand the Scripture I bring in as a proof before I use it as such. I will add one thing more. You

---

[1] Atmore's "Methodist Memorial."

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, 1787, p. 444.

will find it very difficult to use such plain language as will be understood in most congregations. Avoid long periods as much as possible. Imitate Cæsar rather than Cicero; leave the latter to Dr. Middleton and Samuel Furley. It is far better to be understood by our hearers than to be admired by getting out of their depth. To do all the good we can is our one business in life."

Mr. Jones was a man of sense, and piety, and experience; and yet Fletcher hesitated in recommending him to be appointed a tutor in Trevecca College. Did Fletcher sympathize with his friend Charles Wesley in the repugnance which the latter felt to Mr. Jones's ordination by Erasmus, the bishop of the Greek Church? Perhaps so; at all events, the following letter to the Countess of Huntingdon was cautious, if not cold:—

"MADELEY, *July* 1, 1769.

"MY LADY,—Mr. Jones's letter puzzled me a little. I did not know what answer to make to it. I have, however, sat down, and, after an introduction, I say to him—

"'The first and grand point to be kept in view at Lady Huntingdon's College is to maintain and grow in the spirit of faith and power that breathes through the Acts of the Apostles, and was exemplified in the lives of the primitive Christians. The first and grand qualification required in a person called to be at the head of such a college is, then, a degree of faith and power from above, with an entire devotedness to God and His cause.

"'The master, who is there at present, seems, on account of his youth, to be deficient in point of experience. Nor is he a proper master of the Greek, nor even of the harder classics; so that he can hardly maintain his superiority over those who read Cicero and Horace. Whether this inconveniency, Sir, would be avoided, supposing you were appointed to succeed him, I cannot judge by your letter. He is also unacquainted with divinity and the sciences, of which it is proper he should give the students some idea; and how far you may excel him in these points, Sir, is not in my power to determine. He has twenty-five guineas a year, with his board, room, and washing. I dare say the generous foundress would not hesitate to raise the salary of a master of superior merit, though she hopes none would undertake that office for the sake of money.'

"After giving Mr. Jones a little account of the business of the College, I add—

"'The variety of classes in it demands great assiduity and diligence in the master. I would not, therefore, advise anyone to engage without a proper trial. I have begged of Lady Huntingdon not to fix upon a master till she had allowed him to look about him, and see how he liked the place, people, and business; and, as you very properly observe, Sir, it would be improper *to engage, and then to repent of the undertaking.* I think that, if, upon consulting with the Lord in prayer, and with Mr. Maxfield in conversation, you find your heart free to embrace so peculiar an opportunity of being useful to your generation, it might be best to come and see how you like the business, and how it agrees with you; and should not matters prove agreeable on either side, I dare say Lady Huntingdon will pay your travelling expenses to Talgarth,[1] and back again.'

"In a letter to Mr. Maxfield,[2] I desired him to inform your ladyship how Mr. Jones's mind stands after reflecting on the contents of my letter to him, and whether he would go to make a trial. I add, that so much depends upon the aptness to teach, Christian experience, solidity, liveliness, and devotedness of a master, that no one can presume to judge of these things by a letter, or even by a day's conversation.

"If your ladyship does not approve of this step, a line to Mr. Maxfield will rectify what you think amiss, and will oblige, my lady, your unworthy servant,

"J. FLETCHER.

"P.S.—If your ladyship is so good as to spare a minister for three weeks, I shall be glad to wait upon the dear young men and their patroness at the College." [3]

This is an important letter, not only as exhibiting the views of Fletcher, but as containing a curious chapter in the earliest history of Trevecca College. The College, as it was ostentatiously called, had been opened ten months. It had one master; and the author of the "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon" says Joseph Easterbrook was the person who occupied this position; but adduces no proof in support of his assertion. Another, and a far greater authority, attests that the master of the College was a child. Who was he?

In 1788, there was printed "A Sermon, occasioned by the Death of the celebrated Mr. J. Henderson, B.A., of Pembroke College, Oxford: Preached at St. George's, Kingswood, November 23; and at Temple Church, Bristol, November 30, 1788. By the Rev. William Agutter, M.A., of

---

[1] Trevecca College was in the parish of Talgarth, South Wales. It was supposed to be part of an old castle erected in the reign of Henry the Second. The date over the entrance was 1176.

[2] Thomas Maxfield, who had seceded from Wesley's Connexion in 1763, and had received episcopal ordination from the Bishop of Derry.

[3] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 98.

St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford. Published at the request of the Congregations. Bristol. 1788." 8vo, pp. 32. The text of the sermon is, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Mr. Agutter's eulogy of Henderson cannot here be quoted at full length: the following are brief extracts from it:—

> "Mr. Henderson was born, as it were, a thinking being; and was never known to cry, or to express any infantine peevishness. The questions he asked, as soon as he was able to speak, astonished all who heard him."
>
> "His memory was so strong that he retained all he read; and his judgment so solid that he arranged, examined, and digested all that he remembered, and thus made it his own."
>
> "At a time that other children were employed in the drudgery of learning words, he was occupied in obtaining the knowledge of things. *While but a boy, he was engaged to teach the learned languages. At twelve years of age, he taught Greek and Latin in the College of Trevecca. The Governor of the College at that time was the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, late Vicar of Madeley.*"[1]

Mr. Agutter proceeds to say, that, when Fletcher was dismissed from Trevecca, Henderson was dismissed with him.

This, then, was the master—the only master of Trevecca College during the first year of its existence—a child, a wonderful child, twelve years old! A further account of this prodigy, or, as the *Monthly Review*, of 1789, called him, "a second Baratier,"[2] may interest the reader.

His father was a native of Ireland, and, from 1759 to 1771, was one of Wesley's best itinerant preachers,—a man of deep piety, great talent, and amiable disposition; but naturally of a timid and melancholy mind. On relinquishing the itinerancy, he commenced a boarding-school at Hannam, near Bristol; but two of his pupils having been drowned while bathing, his mind was so affected, that he abandoned his school, and opened, at the same place, an asylum for the insane, which Wesley pronounced the best of the kind in the three kingdoms.

---

[1] The *Arminian Magazine*, for 1793, confirms this statement.

[2] Baratier was a German, born in 1721, and is said to have understood the German, French, Greek, and Latin languages when he was five years old. At the age of nine, he could not only translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin or French, but also re-translate these versions into Hebrew. Before he had completed his tenth year, he composed a Hebrew Lexicon of rare and difficult words, with curious critical remarks. In his thirteenth year he translated from the Hebrew "Rabbi Benjamin's Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa," and published them in two volumes, "with historical and critical notes and dissertations." He also, with remarkable success, applied himself to the study of philosophy, mathematics, ecclesiastical history, law, etc. He died in his twentieth year.

John Henderson, his only child, was born at Bellgaran, near Limerick, in 1757, and, as early as possible, was sent to Wesley's School, at Kingswood. At the age of eight, he had made such proficiency in the Latin language, as to be able to teach it in the school. In his twelfth year, as already stated, he became the Master in Trevecca College. When about fourteen years of age, he left Trevecca, and, probably, spent the next ten years with his father at Hannam. At twenty-four, he entered Pembroke College, Oxford; and, in due time, took the degree of Bachelor of Arts. His thirst after knowledge was unbounded; and his amiable temper and remarkable talents secured him the respect of all who knew him. His learning was deep and multifarious. He was skilled in grammar, rhetoric, history, logic, ethics, metaphysics, and scholastic theology. He studied medicine with great attention, and practised it among the poor, wherever he had a chance, gratuitously. He was well versed in geometry, astronomy, and every branch of natural and experimental philosophy, and also in civil and canon laws. Besides several of the modern languages, he was master of the Greek and Latin tongues; and was intimately acquainted with Persic and Arabic. Scarcely a book could be mentioned, but he could give some account of it; nor any subject started, but he could engage in the discussion of it. His talents for conversation were so attractive, various, and multiform, that he was a companion equally acceptable to the philosopher and the man of the world, to the gay, the learned, and illiterate, the young and the old of both sexes. He attracted the notice of Dr. Johnson, was intimate with Sir William Jones, Miss Hannah More, and other celebrities; and Mr. Wilberforce offered him his patronage and a living, if he would reside in London.

Like most geniuses, John Henderson was eccentric. When he first went to Oxford, his clothes were made in a fashion peculiar to himself; he had no stock or neckcloth; and he wore his hair like that of a boy at school. His mode of life was singular. He generally went to bed at daybreak, and rose in the afternoon, except when he was obliged to attend the morning service of the college chapel. Before he retired to rest, he frequently stripped himself naked to the waist, took his station at a pump near his rooms, sluiced his head and the upper part of his body, pumped water over his shirt, and then, putting it on, went to bed. This he jocularly called "an excellent cold bath." He became an ardent admirer of the nonsense of Jacob Behmen's wild philosophical divinity; studied Lavater's "Physiognomy;" and attained to a considerable knowledge of magic and astrology; and declared the possibility of holding correspondence with the spirits of the dead, upon the strength of his own experience.

He died at Oxford, on November 2, 1788, and was buried at St. George's, Kingswood. His father was so painfully affected by the loss of his affectionate and only child, that he caused the corpse to be taken up again, several days after the interment, to satisfy himself that his son was really dead.[1]

Wesley had great love and respect for poor Henderson's father, and, a few months after the young man's untimely death, he wrote:—

> "1789, March 13.—I spent some time with poor Richard Henderson, deeply affected with the loss of his only son; who, with as great talents as most men in England, had lived two-and-thirty years, and done just nothing."[2]

This, however, was scarcely true. Henry Moore, in his "Life of Wesley,"[3] relates an anecdote which is worth preserving, and which must conclude this lengthened notice of the child professor at the Countess of Huntingdon's College at Trevecca. In reference to Wesley's entry in his Journal, Mr. Moore remarks:—

> "Not a vestige of Mr. Henderson's writings remains. This is owing to what some would call a cross providence. He used to visit his father at Hannam, near Bristol, in the summer vacation. He

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1793, pp. 140—144.
[2] Wesley's Journal.
[3] Vol. ii., p. 360.

there studied intensely, and wrote largely. His MSS. he stored in a large trunk without a lock. Returning home, some time before his last illness, he flew to his treasure, but found the trunk empty. He enquired of Mrs. Henderson, who called up the servant, and asked for the papers in the trunk. The girl, who had been hired that year, replied with great simplicity, 'La! ma'am, I thought they were good for nothing, and so I lighted the fire with them during the winter.' Mr. Henderson looked at his excellent mother-in-law for some time, but spoke not a word. He then went into his study, and was never known to mention the subject more."

"Oh! Diamond, Diamond! thou little knowest the mischief thou hast done!" said Sir Isaac Newton to his favourite little dog, who, by upsetting a taper on his desk, had set fire to the papers which contained the whole of his unpublished experiments, and thus reduced to ashes the labours of many years. Poor Henderson, in his misfortune, "spoke not a word." Newton lived thirty years after his great loss, but made no important addition to his scientific discoveries; Henderson died soon after his sad calamity; and hence Wesley's disparaging remark concerning him: "With as great talents as most men in England, he lived two-and-thirty years, and did just nothing." Wesley must have been ignorant of the fact related by Mr. Moore; for, on no other ground can an apology be framed for his unfair remark.

It is time to return to Fletcher. Wesley was not present at the opening of Trevecca College, in 1768, but he took part in the religious services held at the first anniversary in 1769. Whitefield was unavoidably absent, for he was preaching farewell sermons, and administering farewell sacraments, to his London congregations, and, a week afterwards, set out on his final visit to America. But, even without him, the Methodist gathering at Trevecca was *one* of the most remarkable recorded in old Methodist history. Besides Wesley and Fletcher, there were present Howell Harris, the founder of the Welsh Methodists; the Rev. Daniel Rowlands, rector of Llangeitho, with a salary of £10 a year, a preacher whose eloquence was overwhelming, and whose meetings among the Welsh mountains can never be forgotten; the Rev. William Williams, curate of Lanwithid, a brave-hearted man who had met violent persecution without flinching, and a member of the first Conference of the Calvinistic Methodists in Wales, in 1743; Howell Davies, rector of Prengast, an intimate friend of Whitefield, a preacher whom thousands upon thousands flocked to hear, in fields, and on commons and mountains, and the attendance at whose monthly sacraments was so great that his church had to be emptied several times over to make room for the remaining communicants waiting out of doors; the Rev. Peter Williams, another itinerant clergyman of the Established Church, who joined the Methodists as early as the year 1741; and the Hon. and Rev. Walter Shirley, brother of the notorious Earl Ferrers, first cousin of the Countess of Huntingdon, converted under the ministry of Venn, and now an earnest minister of Christ; to whom must be added Lady Huntingdon, the Countess of Buchan, Lady Anne Erskine, and Miss Orton, and also the first students of Trevecca, headed by their juvenile master, John Henderson.

The services were held daily for a whole week, from the 19th to the 25th of August inclusive. Fletcher, Rowlands, and William Williams arrived at the College on Friday, the 18th, and next morning Rowlands preached in the chapel to a crowded congregation, from the words, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" In the afternoon, the Lord's Supper was administered, Fletcher addressing the communicants and spectators, and Williams giving out a hymn, which was sung with great enthusiasm. At night, Howell Harris preached to a large congregation assembled in the court from the text, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." During the day, Walter Shirley and several lay preachers arrived at Trevecca.

On Sunday, August 20, at ten in the morning, Fletcher read the Liturgy in the court, and Shirley preached on, "Acquaint thyself now with Him, and be at peace." At one, the Lord's Supper was administered in the chapel, and Rowlands, Fletcher, and Williams gave addresses. During the afternoon, Fletcher preached in the court to an immense congregation, from, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." When his sermon was ended, Rowlands, in the Welsh language, addressed the crowd from, "It is appointed unto men once to die."

On Monday and Tuesday the clergymen preached, and Howell Harris and several of the lay preachers joined in the services.

On Wednesday, August 23rd, Wesley came, accompanied by Howell Davies and Peter Williams.[1] Wesley writes:—

"Wednesday, August 23rd. I went on to Trevecca. Here we found a concourse of people from all parts, come to celebrate the Countess of Huntingdon's birthday, and the anniversary of her school, which was opened on the twenty-fourth of August, last year. I preached in the evening to as many as her chapel could well contain; which is extremely neat, or rather, elegant; as is the dining-room, the school, and all the house. About nine, Howell Harris desired me to give a short exhortation to his family. I did so; and then went back to my lady's, and laid me down in peace.

"Thursday, August 24th. I administered the Lord's Supper to the family.[2] At ten, the public service began. Mr. Fletcher preached an exceeding lively sermon in the court, the chapel being far too small. After him, Mr. William Williams preached in Welsh till between one and two o'clock. At two we dined. Meantime, a large number of people had baskets of bread and meat carried to them in the court. At three, I took my turn there; then Mr. Fletcher; and about five, the congregation was dismissed. Between seven and eight, the lovefeast began, at which, I believe, many were comforted. In the evening, several of us retired into the neighbouring wood, which is exceeding pleasantly laid out in walks, one of which leads to a little mount raised in the midst of a meadow that commands a delightful prospect. This is Howell Harris's work, who has likewise greatly enlarged and beautified his house; so that, with the gardens, orchards, walks, and pieces of water that surround it, it is a kind of little paradise."[3]

This is not the place to enlarge upon Howell Harris's establishment, which adjoined Trevecca College. Suffice it to say, that here he had gathered together a family of more than a hundred persons, "all diligent, all constantly employed, all fearing God and working righteousness."[4]

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., pp. 98, 99.

[2] The author of the "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon" says, "Shirley assisted Wesley," and adds, "The sacrament was first administered to the clergyman, then to the students, and then to Lady Huntingdon, the Countess of Buchan, Lady Anne Erskine, Miss Orton, and the other members of the family."

[3] Wesley's Journal.

[4] *Ibid.*

The lovefeast mentioned by Wesley was the concluding service on the *first anniversary day*, strictly speaking, of Trevecca College. At that lovefeast, Walter Shirley, Howell Davies, and Daniel Rowlands gave short exhortations, and Peter Williams and Howell Harris offered prayers. Lady Huntingdon observes:—

> "Truly our God was in the midst of us, and many felt Him eminently nigh. The gracious influence of His Spirit seemed to rest on every one. Words fail to describe the holy triumph with which the great congregation sang—
>
> "'Captain of Thine enlisted host,
> Display thy glorious banner high,' etc.
>
> It was a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord—a time never to be forgotten."

Next morning, Wesley set off for Bristol; but the services were continued. In the afternoon, Shirley took his stand on the scaffold in the court, and addressed the multitude from the words, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

> "From that time," wrote Lady Huntingdon, "we had public preaching every day at four o'clock, whilst Mr. Shirley and Mr. Fletcher remained. Copious showers of Divine blessing have been felt on every side. Truly God is good to Israel. Continue Thy goodness, and in much greater abundance! O that I may be more and more useful to the souls of my fellow-creatures! I want to be, every moment, all life, all zeal, all activity for God, and ever on the stretch for closer communion with Him. My soul pants to live more to Him; and to be more holy in heart and life, that all my nature may show the glories of the Lamb."[1]

Alas! that these glorious scenes among the Welsh mountains should so soon be followed by scenes of discord and of disputes. The great storm of the Calvinian controversy was already brewing.

Walter Sellon occupies a rather unique position in Methodistic annals. He died in 1792, at the age of seventy-seven; and yet of the first thirty, and the last twenty-two years of his life, hardly anything is known. Dr. Abel Stevens, in his "History of Methodism," says Sellon was originally a baker; but I know of no authority for this, except Toplady's, whose hatred and abuse of Sellon were such as to justify a hesitancy in believing a statement concerning his stout antagonist, which he intended to be injurious to his fame. Sellon was born in the year 1715; but up to the year 1745 he had not been introduced to Wesley. In a letter to Wesley, dated December 31, 1744, he states, that, until recently, he had condemned him as "an innovator," and had "pitied those who followed" him. But, having heard Wesley preach, and having read his sermon on "Scriptural Christianity," delivered before the Oxford University on August 24, 1744, his opinions concerning him and his followers were entirely changed; and he now requested Wesley, when he had an opportunity, to preach at Maidenhead, "where drunkenness, adultery, profaneness, gaming, and almost every abominable vice, were not only committed with greediness, but gloried in, and boasted of."[1] Whether Wesley went to Maidenhead, which seems to have been Sellon's place of residence, is not known; but, three years and a half afterwards, when he opened his famous Kingswood School, Walter Sellon was appointed the Head-master "for the Classics."[2] About the year 1754, Sellon received episcopal ordination, and became curate of the churches of Smisby, near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and of Breedon, where vast multitudes flocked to hear him, "not only from adjacent towns and villages, but frequently from places ten, fifteen, and twenty miles distant." "He was a real Methodist," wrote Jonathan Edmondson, "and hundreds were turned to God through his instrumentality."[3] Sellon enjoyed the confidential friendship of Wesley, and especially of Wesley's brother Charles; and, about the time of his appointment to his curacies, stood faithfully by them in their contentions with the most able and prominent of their itinerant preachers, concerning the separation of the Methodists from the Established Church. All his publications were controversial; and all, except his first, were written specially in defence of the anti-Calvinian doctrines Wesley taught. This is not the place to review Walter Sellon as an author. Suffice it to say, that he was always powerful, rather than polite; and that, after his first publication, in 1765, which was levelled at Socinianism, he prepared a second in 1768, which was entitled, "Arguments against the Doctrine of General Redemption considered." Without noticing, at present, the subsequent writings of Sellon, it is enough to add, that, about the year 1770, he was presented by the Earl of Huntingdon to the Vicarage of Ledsham, in Yorkshire, where he lived and laboured until his death, on June 13, 1792.[1] In an unpublished manuscript, John Pawson says:—

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., pp. 98—101.

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1778, p. 327.
[2] Myles' "Chronological History of the Methodists."
[3] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1856, p. 38.

> "I do not believe Mr. Sellon was made the instrument of awakening a single soul after he came to Ledsham. He was tutor to young Mr. Medhurst, of Kippax, who lately murdered his wife, and would have murdered his mother some years ago, if my brother Tarboton had not rescued her at the hazard of his own life. While in that family, Mr. Sellon seemed to lose all spirit and life, and, as far as I could learn, had very little savour of godliness about him. He took not the least notice of the Methodists, no more than if he had never known them."

John Pawson was one of Wesley's most honest and hard-working itinerants; but he sometimes was more severe in his strictures than was desirable. His remark, however, concerning Sellon's abandonment of the Methodists was probably correct; for Wesley, in a letter dated June 10, 1784, wrote to him: "You used to meet me when I came near you; but you seem, of late, to have forgotten your old friend and brother."[2]

To return to Fletcher. He and Sellon were well known to each other. Four years ago, they had exchanged pulpits for a season, Sellon preaching at Madeley, and Fletcher at Smisby and Breedon-on-the-Hill. Now Sellon was entering the arena of controversy. The expulsion of the Methodist students from Oxford University, in 1768, had been the means, incidentally, of bringing some of the chief doctrines of Calvinism into public notice. Sir Richard Hill, in defending the students, had warmly advocated Calvinistic predestination. Dr. Nowell, in answering Sir Richard, had clearly shown that this predestination was not the doctrine of the Church of England. Toplady had rushed to the rescue of his favourite dogma, and had published his translation of "Zauchius," and also his "Letter to Dr. Nowell." Sellon was the first of Wesley's friends who entered the lists, by preparing and publishing his "Arguments against the Doctrine of General Redemption considered. London, 1769." 12mo. 178 pp. Wesley encouraged him, and so did Fletcher. The former wrote as follows:—

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1856, p. 41.
[2] Wesley's Works, vol. xiii., p. 43.

"WAKEFIELD, *July* 9, 1768.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I am glad you have undertaken the 'Redemption Redeemed;' but you must in no wise forget Dr. Owen's answer to it: otherwise you will leave a loop-hole for all the Calvinists to creep out. The Doctor's evasions you must needs cut in pieces, either interweaving your answers with the body of the work, under each head, or adding them in marginal notes.

"Your ever affectionate brother,
"J. WESLEY."[1]

After the book was published, Fletcher wrote to Sellon the following letter, plainly showing that the great Calvinian controversy, though as yet in its incipient state, was causing considerable commotion:—

"MADELEY, *October* 7, 1769.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I thank you for your letter and books. They came safe to hand, and I shall give you the amount at the first opportunity. I have inquired what the Calvinists think; but they choose to be silent,—a sign that they have not any great thing to object. Mr. R——[2] looked at your book here in my house, and objected to Ελεησω ον αν ελεω, Rom. ix. 15. He says, ελεω is, 'I have mercy,' not 'I should have mercy.' I observed to Mr. Glascott, 'It is the subjunctive mood, and may take the sign should, would, or could, according to the analogy of faith.'

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xiii. p. 41.

[2] Probably Romaine, who was at Berwick, near Shrewsbury, on September 9, 1769, and wrote a letter full of his strongest Calvinism. (See Romaine's Works, vol. vi., p. 330. Edition 1813.)

"I long to see Coles[1] answered. My request to you is, that you would answer him in the cool manner you have the Synod;[2] and my prayer to God is, that you may be assisted for that important work.

"I know two strong Calvinist believers, who lately took their leave of this world with, 'I shall be damned.' O, what did all their professions of perseverance do for them? They left them in the lurch. May we have the power of God in our souls, and we shall readily leave unknown decrees to others.

The Lord give you patience with your brethren! The best way to confound them is, to preach that kingdom of God which they cast away, with real righteousness, and present peace and joy in believing; that is poison to the synodical kingdom.

"I despair of seeing you before I have seen Switzerland, which I design to visit next winter. Mr. Ireland takes me as far as Lyons in my way.

"There are some disputes in Lady Huntingdon's College; but when the power of God comes, they drop them. The Calvinists are three to one. Your book I have sent them as a hard nut for them to crack.

"May the Lord spare you, and make you a free, joyful soldier of the Lord Jesus; as tough against sin and unbelief as you are against Calvin and the Synod! The Lord has overruled your leaving Smisby for good. Let us trust in Him, and all will be well. Farewell.

"JOHN FLETCHER."[3]

This episode respecting Walter Sellon is not irrelevant, and is of considerable importance, inasmuch as it relates, in part, to the rise of the great Calvinian controversy of the last century, in which Fletcher became one of the chief actors. Sellon's book, in favour of the doctrine of "General Redemption," was the first published by Wesley's adherents, and is exceedingly able; but this is not the place to analyse and give an account of it.

Seventeen years had elapsed since Fletcher left his father's house in Switzerland. He had now decided to pay a visit

---

[1] Elisha Coles, a clerk to the East India Company, who died in 1688. His "Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty," here referred to, was answered by Sellon a year or two afterwards.

[2] The Synod of Dort, held at Dort in 1618 and 1619, and consisting of thirty-eight Dutch and Walloon divines, five professors of the Dutch Universities, and twenty-one Lay-elders; besides twenty-eight foreign divines, from England and other countries. At this celebrated Synod, the five points of difference between the Calvinists and Arminians were decided in favour of the former. Sellon, in his able book, controverts this decision, at all events so far as the doctrine of predestination is concerned.

[3] Fletcher's Works, vol. viii., p. 205.

---

to the place of his nativity, and to travel as far as the south of France with his generous friend, Mr. Ireland, of Brislington, Bristol. The following letter to Mr. Ireland refers to this contemplated visit, and to another matter, which must be noticed :—

"MADELEY, *December* 30, 1769.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Last night, I received your obliging letter, and am ready to accompany you to Montpelier, provided you will go with me to Nyon. I shall raise about twenty guineas, and, with that sum, a gracious Providence, and your purse, I hope we shall want for nothing. If the Lord sends me, I should want nothing, though I had nothing, and though my fellow-traveller were no richer than myself.

"I hope to be at Bristol soon, to offer you my services to pack up. You desired to have a Swiss servant, and I offer myself to you in that capacity; for I shall be no more ashamed of serving you, as far as I am capable of doing, than I am of wearing your livery.

"Two reasons (to say nothing of the pleasure of your company) engage me to go with you to Montpelier,—a desire to visit some poor Huguenots in the south of France, and the need I have to recover a little French before I go to converse with my compatriots.

"The priest at Madeley is going to open his mass-house, and I declared war on that account last Sunday, and propose to strip the whore of Babylon and expose her nakedness to-morrow. All the papists are in a great ferment, and have held meetings to consult on the occasion. One of their bloody bullies came 'to pick up a quarrel' with me, as he said, and what would have been the consequence had I not had company with me I know not. How far more rage may be kindled to-morrow I don't know; but I question whether it will be right for me to leave the field in these circumstances. I forgot to mention that two of our poor ignorant Churchmen are about to join the mass-house, which also is the cause of my having taken up arms."[1]

Fletcher preached his anti-popery sermon as he intended, taking as his text 1 Tim. iv. 1-3: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." An outline of the sermon may be found in Fletcher's Collected Works, vol. vii., p. 490. As the people were leaving the church, a man, who acted as the spokesman of the papists present, cried, "There was not a word of truth in the whole sermon;" and then, turning to Fletcher, assured him that he would shortly produce a gentleman who would refute all that he had said. The threat was not fulfilled;[1] and Benson, in his "Life of Fletcher," first published in 1804, remarks:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 208.

> "By Mr. Fletcher's bold and prudent stand the designs of the papists were in a great measure frustrated, and they were prevented making any progress worth mentioning in Madeley. It is true there is even now a mass-house and a priest at Madeley, but I find, upon inquiry, there are not a dozen Popish families in the parish."

Fletcher's intended visit to Switzerland was, for a little while, deferred; because he deemed it his duty to await the threatened refutation of his anti-popish sermon. Hence, early in January 1770, he went to Trevecca; probably for the purpose of meeting Joseph Benson, who was about to become head master of the college.

Joseph Benson was now nearly twenty-two years of age, and for the last four years had been the classical master of Wesley's school at Kingswood, and was at present keeping terms at Oxford. His acquaintance with Fletcher was slight, but his admiration of him great. He writes:—

> "I had only had two or three interviews with Mr. Fletcher, which were, I think, in the year 1768, when I was classical master at Kingswood school. As he occasionally made an excursion from Madeley to Bristol and Bath, in one of these excursions we invited him to preach at Kingswood. He came, and took as his text, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' The people were exceedingly affected; indeed quite melted down. The tears streamed so fast from the eyes of the poor colliers that their black faces were washed by them. As to himself, he was carried out so far beyond his strength that, when he concluded, he put off his shirt, which was as wet as if it had been dipped in water. But this was nothing strange; whenever he preached it was generally the case. From this time, I conceived a particular esteem for him, chiefly on account of his piety; and wished much for a further acquaintance with him, a blessing which I soon after obtained; for through his means, and in consequence of Mr. Wesley's recommendation to the Countess of Huntingdon, I was made head master of the

---

[1] Fletcher's Works, vol. vii., p. 494.

academy, or, as it was commonly called, the college, at Trevecca, though I could ill be spared from Kingswood, where I had acted in that capacity about four years. Being greatly wanted at Kingswood, and having likewise a term to keep at Oxford, I could only pay them a short visit for the present, which was in January 1770; but in the spring following, I went to reside there, and for some time was well satisfied with my situation."[1]

No record exists of what transpired between Fletcher and Benson at Trevecca; but the following letter, written there, and addressed to Mr. Ireland, deserves insertion:—

"TREVECCA, *January* 13, 1770.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I know not what to think of our journey. My heart frequently recoils. I have lost all hope of being able to preach in French, and I think if I could they would not permit me. I become more stupid every day; my memory fails me in a surprising manner. I am good for nothing, but to go and bury myself in my parish. I have those touches of misanthropy which make solitude my element. Judge, then, whether I am fit to go into the world. On the other hand, I fear that your journey is undertaken partly from complaisance to me, and in consequence of the engagement we made to go together. I acquit you of your promise; and, if your business does not really demand your presence in France, I beg you will not think of going there on my account. The bare idea of giving you trouble would make the journey ten times more disagreeable to me than the season of the year.

"The day after I wrote to you I preached the sermons against popery, which I had promised to my people; and Mr. S—t—r called out several times in the churchyard, as the people went out of church, that 'there was not one word of truth in the whole of my discourse, and that he would prove it.' He also told me that he would produce a gentleman who should answer my sermon and the pamphlet I had distributed. I was, therefore, obliged to declare in the church that I should not quit England, and was only going into Wales, from whence I would return soon to reply to the answer of Mr. S—t—r and the priest, if they should offer any. I am thus obliged to return to Madeley by my word so blicly pledged, as well as to raise a little money for my journey. Were it not for these circumstances, I believe I should pay you a visit at Bristol, notwithstanding my misanthropy.

"The hamper which you mention, and for which I thank you, provided it be the last, arrived three days before my departure, but not knowing what it was, nor for whom it was intended, I put it into my cellar without opening it. I want the *living water* rather than cider, and righteousness more than clothes. I fear, however, lest my unbelief should make me set aside the fountain whence it flows, as I did your hamper. Be that as it may, it is high time to open the treasures of Divine mercy, and to seek in the heart of Jesus for the springs of love, righteousness, and life. The Lord give us grace so to seek that we may find, and be enabled to say with the woman in the Gospel, 'I have found the piece of silver which I had lost.'

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"If your affairs do not really call you to France I will wait until Providence and grace shall open a way to me to the mountains of Switzerland, if I am ever to see them again. Adieu! Give yourself *wholly* to God. A divided heart, like a divided kingdom, falls naturally by its own gravity either into darkness or into sin. My heart's desire is that the love of Jesus may fill your soul, and that of your unworthy and greatly obliged servant,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

The journey to Switzerland was deferred, but took place; though no one seems to know the exact date when it was begun or when it ended. In the month of July, however, Fletcher was again in England. Strangely enough, there is no letter of his that refers to the extensive tour made by him and his friend Ireland; but the latter sent the following account to Mr. Benson:—

"I was with Mr. Fletcher, day and night, nearly five months, travelling all over Italy and France. At that time, a popish priest resided in his parish, who attempted to mislead the poor people. Mr. Fletcher, therefore, throughout this journey, attended the sermons of the Roman Catholic clergy, visited their convents and monasteries, and conversed with all the most serious among them whom he met with, in order that he might know their sentiments concerning spiritual religion. He was so very particular in making observations respecting the gross and absurd practices of the priests and other clergy, especially while we were in Italy, that we were frequently in no small danger of our lives. He wished to attend the Pope's chapel at Rome, but I would not consent to accompany him till I had obtained a promise from him that he would forbear to speak by way of censure or reproof of what he saw or heard. He met with many men of science and learning, with whom he conversed freely on Gospel truths, which most of them opposed with violence. A few listened and were edified. His whole life, as you well know, was a sermon; all his conversations were sermons. Even his disputations with infidels were full of instruction. We met with a gentleman of fortune, an excellent classical scholar, with whom we continued near a fortnight at an hotel. He said he had travelled all over Europe, and had passed through all the Societies in England to find a person whose life corresponded with the Gospels and with Paul's Epistles. He asked me (for it was with me he first began to converse) if I knew any clergyman or dissenting minister in England, possessed of a stipend of £100 a year for the cure of souls, who would not leave them all if he were offered double that amount. I replied in the affirmative, and pointed to my friend Fletcher; when disputations commenced, which continued for many days." [1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 210.

Mr. Gilpin, in Fletcher's "Portrait of St. Paul," adds to this account. He says:—

"This debate was continued, by adjournment, for the space of a week. Whatever had been said upon the subject by the most celebrated writers was brought forward, and thoroughly discussed. Mr. Fletcher repeatedly overcame his antagonist, who regularly lost his temper and his cause together. Mr. Fletcher took a view of the Christian's enviable life, his consolation in trouble, and his tranquillity in danger; together with his superiority to all the evils of life and the horrors of death; interspersing his remarks with affectionate admonitions and powerful persuasives to a rational dependence upon the truths of the Gospel. At the conclusion of this memorable debate, the unsuccessful disputant conceived so exalted an idea of his opponent's character, that he never afterwards mentioned his name but with peculiar veneration and regard; and when they met again, eight years later, in Provence, where the gentleman lived in affluence, he showed Mr. Fletcher every possible civility, entertained him at his house in the most hospitable manner, and listened to his conversation on spiritual subjects with all imaginable attention and respect."

Mr. Gilpin mentions another incident of the same kind. Fletcher, in his travels, met a young gentleman from Genoa, who had imbibed the infidel notions of the day. They had a debate, which lasted several days, from morning till night. The sceptic was vanquished, and was so struck with the masterly skill of Fletcher, and his more than parental concern, that, before they parted, he looked up to his instructor with reverence, listened to him with admiration, and desired to be present at morning and evening prayer.[2]

While at Marseilles, Mr. Ireland procured for Fletcher the use of a Protestant church in that neighbourhood; but the engagement to preach in it caused Fletcher great anxiety, probably because he had lost his facility in speaking the French language. He prayed about it earnestly all the week; and when Sunday morning came, he entreated Mr. Ireland to inform the minister of the church that he was unable to fulfil his engagement. Mr. Ireland refused; and Fletcher was compelled to ascend the pulpit, where he preached with such effect, that the whole congregation, among whom were many ministers, were in tears.[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] "Portrait of St. Paul."

He determined, while in the south of France, to visit the Protestants in the Cevennes mountains, whose fathers had suffered so severely in the cause of Christ; "the heretics of the Cevennes, those accursed remainders of the old Albigenses," as the Bull of Clement XI., dated 1703, designated them. The journey was long and difficult, but no argument could prevail with him to abandon his resolution of attempting it on foot. "Shall I," said he to his friend Ireland, "make a visit on horseback and at ease, to those poor cottagers, whose fathers were hunted along the rocks, like partridges upon the mountains? No: I will visit them under the plainest appearance, with my staff in my hand." Accordingly, he set out alone, and, after travelling till it was nearly dark, he entered a small house, and begged the favour of being allowed to sit in a chair till morning. The master of the cottage, after some hesitation, consented. Conversation followed; the host and hostess were charmed; the best provisions in their humble dwelling were given to the traveller; and, before they retired to rest, prayer was proposed and offered. Early on the morrow, the strange visitant renewed his conversation and his prayers; father, mother, and children were melted into tears; and the poor man himself told his neighbours that he had nearly refused to admit a stranger into his house, who was more an angel than a man. The family were papists.

Continuing his journey, Fletcher reached a small town, where he was entertained by a pious minister, to whom he had been recommended. The Protestants received him with open arms. He conversed with their elders; admonished their youth; visited their sick; and preached with freedom and success. Many among them were comforted, and many built up in their most holy faith.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

As he travelled over the mountains, he, one day, put up in a small dwelling, whose master could hardly speak without uttering an oath. Of course, Fletcher, in his own peculiar way, reproved the swearer; and, with such effect, that the man confessed his sin; and ever afterwards, when in danger of falling into his old habit, nothing more was necessary to restrain him than to remember the saintly stranger who had once obtained a lodging beneath his humble roof.[1]

Fletcher and Mr. Ireland proceeded from France to Italy, and traversed the celebrated Appian Way. As they approached it, Fletcher directed the driver to stop; for, said he to Mr. Ireland, "I cannot *ride* over ground where the Apostle Paul once *walked*, chained to a soldier." As soon as he set his foot upon the old Roman road, he took off his hat; and, walking on with his eyes lifted up to heaven, he gave God thanks for the glorious truths which Paul preached. He rejoiced that, in England, these truths were still published; and prayed that they might be revived in Italy. He reviewed the life, the travels, the labours, and the sufferings of the great Apostle, his remarks being intermixed with prayer and praise, and the man himself resembling an incarnation of devotion.[2]

On arriving in Switzerland, he was at once solicited by the clergy at Nyon to occupy their pulpits. He complied with their requests; and, wherever he was announced to preach, multitudes from all quarters flocked to hear him. Even deists listened to him with admiration, and the crowds seemed to think him more than human. Despisers of revelation were overawed and confounded; formalists were roused; and careless sinners startled. One of his converts betook himself to sacred studies, and became a Protestant minister at Lyons. When the time for Fletcher's departure came, a good old minister, of more than threescore years and ten, besought him, with indescribable earnestness, to stay a little longer, even were it only for a single week; and, when he found that this was impracticable, the old gentleman burst into tears, and, addressing Mr. Ireland, cried, "Oh, Sir, how unfortunate for my country! During my lifetime, it has produced but one angel of a man, and now it is our lot to lose him!" At length the carriage, that was to bear away the travellers, appeared; multitudes crowded round about it, anxious to receive a last word or look; and not a few followed it for above two miles, before they could summon sufficient resolution to bid farewell to their saintly compatriot whom they had learned to love so much.[1]

---

[1] Gilpin's "Notes to Portrait of St. Paul."
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

Fletcher reached England about the time of midsummer 1770. His tour had done him good, and had prepared him for the more than ordinary trials that awaited him.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE CALVINIAN CONTROVERSY.

1770 AND 1771.

DURING his absence from England, Fletcher wrote several letters to the masters and students of the Countess of Huntingdon's College at Trevecca;[1] but none of these have been published, and, probably, none of them now exist. Immediately after his return, and before he had an opportunity of visiting the College, he indited the following remarkable epistle:—

"MADELEY, *July* 23, 1770.

"To the masters and students of Lady Huntingdon's College.

"Grace, mercy, and peace attend you, my dear brethren, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Brother Jesus Christ!

"*Brother*, do I say? Should I not rather have written *All?* Is not He *all and in all?* *All* to believers, for He is their God, as the λογος (*the Word*), and their Friend, Brother, Father, Spouse, etc., etc., etc., as He is λογος γενομενος σαρξ (*the Word made flesh*). From Him, through Him, and in Him, I salute you in the Spirit. I believe He is here with me, and in me. I believe He is yonder with you, and in you; for 'in Him we live, move, and have,' not only our animal, but rational and spiritual, 'being.' May the powerful grain of faith remove the mountain of remaining unbelief, that you and I may see things as God sees them! When this is the case, we shall discover that the Creator is *All* indeed, and that creatures, which we are wont to put in His place, are mere nothings, passing clouds that our Sun of Righteousness has thought fit to clothe Himself with, and paint some of His glories upon. In an instant, He could scatter them into their original nothing, or resorb them for ever, and stand without competitor, יהוה, the *Being*.

"But suppose that all creatures should stand for ever, little signatures of God, what are they even in their most glorious estate, but as tapers kindled by His light, as well as formed by His power? Now conceive a Sun, a spiritual Sun, whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference can be found nowhere; a Sun whose lustre as much surpasses the brightness of the luminary that rules the day, as the Creator surpasses the creature; and say, What are the twinkling tapers of good men on earth,—what is the smoking flax of wicked creatures,—what the glittering stars of saints in heaven? Why, they are all lost in His transcendent glory, and if any one of these would set himself up as an object of esteem, regard, or admiration, he must indeed be mad with *self* and *pride*. He must be, as dear Mr. Howell Harris has often told us, a foolish apostate, a devil.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"Understand this, believe this, and you will sink to unknown depths of self-horror, for having aspired at being *somebody*, self-humiliation at seeing yourself *nobody*, or what is worse an *evil-body*.

"But I would not have you dwell even upon this evil, so as to lose sight of your Sun, unless it be to see Him covered, on this account, with our flesh and blood, and wrapt in the cloud of our nature. Then you will cry out with St. Paul, 'O the depth!' Then, finding the manhood is again resorbed into the Godhead, you will gladly renounce all selfish, separate existence in Adam and from Adam. You will take Christ to be your life; you will become His members by eating His flesh and drinking His blood; you will consider His flesh as your flesh, His bone as your bone, His Spirit as your spirit, His righteousness as your righteousness, His cross as your cross, and His crown (whether of thorns or glory) as your crown. You will reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through this dear Redeemer. You will renounce propriety; you will heartily and gladly say, 'Not I, not I, but Christ liveth; and only *because He lives*, I do, and shall live also.'

"When it is so with us, then we are creatures in our Creator, and redeemed creatures in our Redeemer. Then we understand and feel what He says, 'Without Me the Creator, ye are nothing; without Me the Saviour, ye can do nothing.' 'The moment I consider Christ and myself as two, I am gone,' says Luther; and I say so too. I am gone into self, and into Antichrist; for that which will be *something*, will not let Christ be *all;* and that which will not let Christ be all, must certainly be Antichrist. What a poor, jejune, dry thing is doctrinal Christianity, compared with the clear and *heartfelt assent* that the believer gives to these fundamental truths! What life, what strength, what comfort flow out from them! O my friends, let us believe, and we shall see, taste, and handle the Word of Life. When I stand in unbelief, I am like a drop of muddy water drying up in the sun of temptation. I can neither comfort, nor help, nor preserve myself. When I do believe and close in with Christ, I am like that same drop losing itself in a boundless, bottomless sea of purity, light, life, power, and love. There *my good* and *my evil* are equally nothing; equally swallowed up; and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

"There I wish you all to be. There I beg you and I may meet with all God's children. I long to see you that I may impart unto you (should God make use of such a worm) some spiritual gift, and that I may be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me, and by your growth in grace, and in divine as well as human wisdom, during my long absence. I hope matters will be so contrived that I may be with you, to behold your order, before the anniversary. Meanwhile, I remain your affectionate fellow-labourer and servant in the Gospel of Christ,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

No wonder that the visits of a man breathing such a spirit were welcomed. Mr. Benson, the head master of the College, writes :—

"He was received as an angel of God. It is not possible for me to describe the veneration in which we all held him. Like Elijah, in the schools of the prophets, he was revered; he was loved; he was almost adored; not only by every student, but by every member of the family.

"And indeed he was worthy. The reader will pardon me, if he thinks I exceed. My heart kindles while I write. Here it was that I saw, shall I say, an angel in human flesh? I should not far exceed the truth if I said so. But here I saw a descendant of fallen Adam, so fully raised above the ruins of the fall, that, though by the body he was tied down to earth, his *whole conversation was in heaven*. His *life*, from day to day, was *hid with Christ in God*. Prayer, praise, love, and zeal, all ardent, elevated above what one would think attainable in this state of frailty, were the element in which he continually lived. As to others, his one employment was, to call, entreat, and urge them, to ascend with him to the glorious source of being and blessedness. He had leisure, comparatively, for nothing else. Languages, arts, sciences, grammar, rhetoric, logic, even divinity itself, were all laid aside, when he appeared in the schoolroom among the students. His full heart would not suffer him to be silent. He *must* speak, and they were readier to hearken to this servant and minister of Jesus Christ, than to attend to Sallust, Virgil, Cicero, or any Latin or Greek historian, poet, or philosopher they had been engaged in reading. And they seldom hearkened long, before they were all in tears, and every heart catched fire from the flame that burned in his soul.

"These seasons generally terminated in this. Being convinced that to be 'filled with the Holy Ghost' was a better qualification for the ministry of the Gospel than any classical learning (though that too may be useful in its place), after speaking awhile in the schoolroom, he used frequently to say, 'As many of you as are athirst for the fulness of the Spirit, follow me into my room.' On this, many of us instantly followed him, and there continued till noon, *for two or three hours*, praying for one another, till we could bear to kneel no longer. This was done, not once or twice, but many times; and I have sometimes seen him, on these occasions—once in particular—so filled with the love of God, that he cried out, 'O my God, withhold Thy hand, or the vessel will burst!' But he afterwards told me, he was afraid he had grieved the Spirit of God, and that he ought to have prayed that the Lord would have enlarged the vessel, or have suffered it to break, that the soul might have had no further bar to its enjoyment of the Supreme Good.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"Such was the ordinary employment of this man of God, while he remained at Trevecca. He preached the word of life to the students and family, and to as many of the neighbours as desired to be present. He was always employed, either in illustrating some important truth, or exhorting to some neglected duty, or administering some needful comfort, or relating some useful anecdote, or making some profitable remark. His devout soul, always burning with love and zeal, led him to intermingle prayer with all he uttered. His manner was so solemn and, at the same time, so mild and insinuating, that it was hardly possible for any one to be in his company without being struck with awe and charmed with love, as if in the presence of an angel or departed spirit. Indeed, I frequently thought, while attending to his heavenly discourse, that he was so different from the generality of mankind as to look more like Moses or Elijah, or some prophet or apostle come again from the dead, than a mortal man dwelling in a house of clay."[1]

This, to some, may appear excessive eulogy; and, therefore, the reader is reminded that Joseph Benson, who wrote it, was not a weak-minded fanatic, but a man of robust understanding, a classical scholar of no mean attainments, an able commentator on the Old and New Testaments, one of the most powerful and successful preachers of his times, and twice President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Such a man was not likely to write random words. He knew Fletcher, and, to the best of his power, described him accurately. And, further, it must be remembered that Benson's testimony was endorsed by Wesley, who inserted it verbatim in his "Life of Fletcher."

Such was Fletcher; and yet this half-angelic man had soon to leave Trevecca! The reasons for this must now be given. The subject will be far from pleasant; but, in a Life of Fletcher, it cannot be evaded. For some time past, the storm of the Calvinian controversy had been brewing; now the crisis came, and the storm burst with terrific violence.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

Before proceeding, however, with the history of the controversy, there is a letter belonging to this period too interesting to be omitted. David Simpson, who had belonged to Rowland Hill's Methodist Society, at Cambridge, had recently received episcopal ordination, and begun his famous ministry. Like Wesley, Whitefield, Berridge, Rowland Hill, and others, he was inclined to become, to some extent, an itinerant preacher, and, therefore, *irregular.* He was only twenty-four years of age, without experience, and in need of counsel. Accordingly, he wrote to Fletcher, who returned the following answer:—

"MADELEY, *August* 4, 1770.

"REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—I have sometimes preached in licensed places, but have never been censured for it. Perhaps it is because my superiors in the Church think me not worth their notice, and despair of shackling me with their unevangelical regularity. If the Bishop were to take me to task about this piece of irregularity, I would observe,—

"1. That the canons of men cannot overthrow the canons of God. 'Preach the word. Be instant in season and out of season.' 'The time cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship,' particularly and exclusively of all other places, neither upon mount Gerizim, nor upon mount Zion; but they shall worship everywhere in spirit and in truth. The contrary canons are Jewish, and subversive of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; yea, contrary to the right of Churchmen, which must, at least, include the privilege of dissenters.

"2. Before the Bishop shackled me with canons, he charged me to 'look for Christ's lost sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this wicked world;' and these sheep, etc., I will try to gather whenever I meet them. We have a general canon:—'While we have time, let us do good to all men, and especially to them who are of the household of faith.' 'Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature' willing to hear it.

"A Justice of the Peace would once prosecute me upon the Conventicle Act; but, when it came to the point, he durst not do it. Some of my parishioners went and complained to the Bishop about my conventicles. I wrote to the Registrar that I hoped his Lordship, who had given me the above-mentioned charge at my ordination, would not be against my following it; that I thought it hard the tipplers should have twenty or thirty tippling-houses, the papists one meeting-house, and the dissenters three or four, in my parish, undisturbed, and that I should be disturbed, because I would not have God's Word confined to one house; and that, with respect to the canons, it would be absurd to put them in force against preaching clergymen, when they were set aside with respect to catechising, tippling, gaming, and carding clergymen; that I did not desire his Lordship to patronize me, in an especial manner, in the use of my Christian liberty; but that I hoped he would connive at it.

"Whether they received my letter or not, I do not know; but they never attempted to molest me.

"Be modestly and steadily bold for God, and your enemies will be more afraid of you than you of them; or if God will honour you with the badge of persecution, He will comfort and bless you the more for it. May the God of all grace and power be with you more and more! Ask it, dear Sir, for your brother and servant in Christ,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Fletcher had been only a few weeks at home, when Wesley opened the Annual Conference of his Itinerant Preachers. This took place in London, on August 7, 1770. The twenty-eighth question of that Conference was, "What can be done to revive the work of God where it is decayed?" In answering this, it was resolved, 1. That there must be more visitation from house to house; 2. That the books Wesley had printed should be more widely dispersed; 3. That there should be more field-preaching; 4. That there should be preaching at five o'clock in the morning wherever twenty hearers could be obtained; 5. That evils in congregational singing should be corrected; 6. That four fast-days should be observed every year; 7. That the Methodists must be taught to seek and expect, not only *gradual*, but "instantaneous sanctification"; 8. That every Itinerant Preacher, "in every large town, should spend an hour with the children" of the Methodists every week; 9. That no itinerant preacher should be so appointed to preach on Sundays, as to keep him "from church above two Sundays in four."

The last answer to the question is the only one that concerns the Life of Fletcher, and must be given verbatim. Continuing to instruct and direct his preachers, Wesley observed, lastly,—

"Take heed to your doctrine.

"We said, in 1744, 'We have leaned too much toward Calvinism.' Wherein?

"1. With regard to *man's faithfulness.* Our Lord Himself taught us to use the expression, and we ought never to be ashamed of it. We ought steadily to assert, on His authority, that if a man is not 'faithful in the unrighteous mammon,' God will not give him '*the true riches.*'

---

[1] Fletcher's Works, vol. viii., p. 257.

"2. With regard to *working for life.* This also our Lord has expressly commanded us. 'Labour,' εργαζεσθε, literally, 'work for the meat that endureth to everlasting life.' And, in fact, every believer, till he comes to glory, works for as well as *from* life.

"3. We have received it as a maxim, that 'a man is to do nothing in order to justification.' Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God should 'cease from evil, and learn to do well.' Whoever repents should do 'works meet for repentance.' And if this is not *in order* to find favour, what does he do them for?

"Review the whole affair.

"1. Who of us is *now* accepted of God?

"He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart.

"2. But who among those who never heard of Christ?

"He that feareth God, and worketh righteousness according to the light he has.

"3. Is this the same with 'he that is sincere'?

"Nearly, if not quite.

"4. Is not this 'salvation by works'?

"Not by the *merit* of works, but by works as a *condition.*

"5. What have we then been disputing about for these thirty years?

"I am afraid, *about words.*

"6. As to *merit* itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid: we are rewarded 'according to our works,' yea, 'because of our works.' How does this differ from *for the sake of our works?* And how differs this from *secundum merita operum?* As our works *deserve.* Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot.

"7. The grand objection to one of the preceding propositions is drawn from a matter of fact. God does in fact justify those who, by their own confession, neither feared God nor wrought righteousness. Is this an exception to the general rule?

"It is a doubt, God makes any exception at all. But how are we sure that the person in question never did fear God and work righteousness? His own saying so is not proof; for we know how all that are convinced of sin undervalue themselves in every respect.

"8. Does not talking of a justified or a sanctified *state* tend to mislead men, almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, 'according to our works.' According to the whole of our inward tempers, and our outward behaviour."[1]

For the next five years (1770—1775), Fletcher made it his duty to explain and defend these theological theses; and a review of this quinquennial controversy—as concise as possible—must now be attempted.

---

[1] "Minutes of the Methodist Conferences," vol. i., p. 97.

Eight days after the close of Wesley's Conference, Lady Huntingdon, with the Rev. Walter Shirley and the Rev. Henry Venn, arrived at Mr. Ireland's residence at Brislington, on their way to Trevecca to attend the services in connection with the anniversary of the College. Wesley had been at the anniversary a year ago, and had been invited to be at the present one. Accordingly, he remained in Bristol with the expectation of accompanying her ladyship to Wales, but, horrified by the doctrinal minutes of his late Conference, she wrote to him saying that, until he renounced such doctrines, she must exclude him from all her pulpits. Wesley returned no reply to this communication, but, next day, calmly and quietly set out for Cornwall.[1]

The day after this, the Countess, accompanied by Shirley and Venn, Lady Anne Erskine, Miss Orton, Mr. Ireland, and Mr. Lloyd, started for Trevecca, where Fletcher, the President of the College, was ready to receive them. Here, also, were assembled three of the Methodist clergymen in Wales, William Williams, Peter Williams, and Daniel Rowlands; likewise Howell Harris, and several other lay preachers and exhorters. On Wednesday, August 23, at nine in the morning, Shirley administered the Lord's Supper; at ten, Fletcher preached; at two in the afternoon, Venn addressed the students; and at four, Howell Harris addressed a large congregation in the court of the College. On Thursday morning, August 24, Venn administered the sacrament; at ten, Daniel Rowlands and William Williams preached in the court; at two, Shirley examined the students, and gave an exhortation; at four, Peter Williams discoursed in the chapel, and some of the lay preachers in the court. In the evening Berridge arrived at the College.

On Friday, August 24, the anniversary day of the opening, a public prayer-meeting was held in the chapel, at six o'clock in the morning, when Rowlands, Williams, Harris, and Berridge offered prayer; after which Fletcher, as President of the College, administered the Lord's Supper, first to ten clergymen, then to the students, then to Lady Huntingdon and her household, and then to the congregation in general. Public service began at ten. A scaffold was erected in the court, on which sat all the clergy, dissenting ministers, lay preachers, and students. Fletcher read the liturgy of the Church of England, Peter Williams offered extemporary prayer, the vast congregation sang most lustily the glorious hymn of heretical Wesley, beginning with the line,

---

[1] It is said that when Shirley sent her ladyship a copy of Wesley's Doctrinal Minutes, she burnt it. (Bogue and Bennett's "History of Dissenters.")

"Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!"

Shirley preached from the words, "For after that, in the wisdom of God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Then William Williams followed with a sermon in Welsh. At two, her ladyship's guests all dined, the people in the chapel and in the court continuing to sing and pray. At three, Berridge discoursed from, "They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." After him, Daniel Rowlands, in his own eloquent and powerful manner, addressed the multitude in Welsh, taking as his text, "We preach Christ crucified." In the evening, Venn delivered a sort of charge to the ministers, students, and lay preachers, from the text, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;" and Fletcher concluded the services of the anniversary by offering prayer.

The next morning, however, at seven o'clock, these godly and earnest people held another prayer-meeting in the chapel, in which Shirley, Venn, Berridge, and Fletcher took part. On the day following, Sunday, August 26, Venn and Berridge preached, and then this memorable assemblage dispersed, Lady Huntingdon proceeding, by way of Berwick and Worcester, to Bristol, where she met Charles Wesley, and, despite the heresy of his brother and the itinerants at the late Conference, took him to Bath to preach several times in her chapel in that city.[1]

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., pp. 106—109.

Truly, these were glorious days; but, mournful to relate, they were soon followed by days of strife and bitterness. Wesley was accused of having renounced the doctrines of the Reformation. He was traduced as a Pelagian, a Pharisee, a Papist, an Antichrist.[1] All this was unjust and untrue. In less than four months after the memorable Conference of 1770, Wesley preached his "Sermon on the Death of Whitefield," in which he said:—

"The fundamental point of Mr. Whitefield was, give God all the glory of whatever is good in man; and, in the business of salvation, set Christ as high, and man as low as possible. With this point, he and his friends at Oxford, the original Methodists (so-called) set out. Their grand principle was, there is no *power* (by nature) and *no merit* in man. They insisted, all power to think, speak, or act right, is in and from the Spirit of Christ; and all merit is (not in man, how high soever in grace, but merely) in the blood of Christ. So he and they taught: There is no power in man, till it is given him from above, to do one good work, to speak one good word, or to form one good desire. For it is not enough to say, all are *sick of sin:* no, we are all *dead in trespasses and sins.* It follows that all the children of men are *by nature children of wrath.* We are all *guilty before God*, liable to death temporal and eternal.

"And we are all helpless, both with regard to the power and to the guilt of sin. For *who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* None less than the Almighty. Who can raise those that are *dead*, spiritually dead in sin? None but He who raised us from the dust of the earth. But on what consideration will He do this? *Not for works of righteousness that we have done. The dead cannot praise Thee, O Lord!* nor do anything for the sake of which they should be raised to life. Whatever therefore God does, He does it merely for the sake of His well-beloved Son: *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. He Himself bore all our sin in His own body upon the tree. He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification.* Here then is the sole *meritorious cause* of every blessing we do or can enjoy: in particular of our pardon and acceptance with God, of our free and full justification. But by what means do we become interested in what Christ has done and suffered? *Not by works, lest any man should boast;* but by faith alone. *We conclude*, says the Apostle, *that a man is justified by faith, without the works of the law.* And *to as many as* thus *receive Him, giveth He power to become the sons of God: even to those that believe in His name, who are born, not of the will of man, but of God.*

"And *except a man be thus born again, he cannot see the kingdom*

---

[1] Fletcher's Works, vol. i., p. 209.

of God. But all who are thus *born of the Spirit*, have *the kingdom of God within* them. Christ sets up His kingdom in their hearts—*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* That *mind is in them, which was in Christ Jesus*, enabling them to *walk as Christ also walked.* His indwelling Spirit makes them both holy in heart, and *holy in all manner of conversation.* But still, seeing all this is a free gift, through the righteousness and blood of Christ, there is eternally the same reason to remember, *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

"You are not ignorant, that these are the fundamental doctrines which he (Mr. Whitefield) everywhere insisted on. And may they not be summed up, as it were, in two words, *The new birth, and justification by faith.* These let us insist upon, with all boldness, at all times, and in all places. In public (those of us who are called thereto), and, at all opportunities, in private. Keep close to these good old unfashionable doctrines, how many soever contradict and blaspheme. Go on, my brethren, in the *name of the Lord, and in the power of His might.* With all care and diligence, *keep that safe which is committed to your trust:* knowing that *heaven and earth shall pass away;* but this truth *shall not pass away.*"[1]

Thus did Wesley address the crowds of Calvinists, in Whitefield's two London chapels, on Sunday, November 18, 1770. There can be no doubt that he meant this to be an answer to the misrepresentations and calumnies launched against him, on account of the doctrinal minutes of his recent Conference. It ought to have been sufficient to silence his adversaries, but it was not. Passion is more easily excited than appeased. In a letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Glenorchy[2] wrote:—

"EDINBURGH, *January* 10, 1771.

"Your ladyship's account of what occurred at Mr. Wesley's last Conference does not surprise me. I have since seen the Minutes, and must bear my feeble testimony against the sentiments contained in them. May the Lord God of Israel be with you, and enable you to make a firm stand in defence of a free-grace Gospel! Lady Anne's letter has told me all you have been doing in this momentous affair. When you next write to dear Mr. Shirley, give my kindest regards to him, and also to Mr. Venn, Mr. Fletcher, and Mr. Romaine. From what Lady Anne says, I fear very much for Mr. Fletcher that he will be carried off by Mr. Wesley's influence. What will be the end of this business I know not. I know Mr. Wesley is greatly displeased with me, though I have always countenanced his preachers; but now I find this cannot be done by me any longer. Nevertheless, I respect him highly, and pray that he may be led in the way of truth."[1]

---

[1] Wesley's "Sermon on the Death of Whitefield," p. 26.

[2] Lady Glenorchy opened a number of chapels, both in Scotland and England, and did her utmost to supply them with evangelical ministers. She was, in fact, the Lady Huntingdon of Scotland.

Lady Glenorchy executed her conscientious threat. Lady Huntingdon had already done the same. Further action was taken. Joseph Benson was dismissed from Trevecca College, because he adhered to the doctrines of Wesley. The good Countess, however, gave him the following certificate:—

"This is to certify that Mr. Joseph Benson was master for the languages in my College at Talgarth for nine months, and that, during that time, from his capacity, sobriety, and diligence, he acquitted himself properly in that character; and I am ready at any time to testify this on his behalf whenever required.

"College, *January* 17, 1771. S. HUNTINGDON."[2]

Benson was unexceptionable as a classical master; but, in her ladyship's opinion, he was a heretic in theological dogmas, because he did not believe the doctrine of absolute predestination.[3] Fletcher, the president of the college, was dissatisfied with her ladyship's dismissal of the master, and wrote to her as follows:—

"*January* 7, 1771.

"Mr. Benson made a very just defence when he said, he held with me the possibility of salvation for all men; that mercy is offered to all; and yet may be received or rejected. If this be what your ladyship calls Mr. Wesley's opinion, free-will, and Arminianism, and if 'every Arminian must quit the College,' I am actually discharged also; for, in my present view of things, I must hold that sentiment, if I believe that the Bible is true, and that God is love.

"For my part, I am no party-man. In the Lord, I am your servant, and that of your every student; but I cannot give up the honour of being connected with my old friends, who, notwithstanding their failings, are entitled to my respect, gratitude, and assistance, could I occasionally give them any. Mr. Wesley shall always be welcome to my pulpit, and I shall gladly bear my testimony in his, as well as in Mr. Whitefield's. But if your ladyship forbid your students to preach for the one, and offer them to preach for the other at every turn; and if a master is discarded for believing that Christ died for all; then prejudice reigns, charity is cruelly wounded, and party spirit shouts, prevails, and triumphs."

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. i., p. 111.
[2] Macdonald's "Life of Benson."
[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

On the same day, Fletcher wrote to the dismissed Benson the following:—

"*January* 7, 1771.

"DEAR SIR,—The same post brought me yours, and two from my lady, and one from Mr. Williams.[1] Their letters contained no charges, but general ones, which with me go for nothing. If the procedure you mention be fact, and your letter be a fair account of the transactions and words relative to your discharge, a false step has been taken. I write by this post to her ladyship on the affair, with all possible plainness. If the plan of the college be overthrown, I have nothing more to say to it. I will keep to my tent for one; the confined tool of any one party I never was, and never will be. If the blow that should have been struck at *the dead spirit*, is struck at *dead* Arminius, or *absent* Mr. Wesley,—if a master is turned away without any fault, it is time for me to stand up with firmness, or to withdraw.

"Take care, my dear Sir, not to make matters worse than they are; and cast a mantle of forgiving love over the circumstances that might injure the cause of God, so far as it is put into the hands of that eminent lady, who has so well deserved of the Church of Christ. Rather suffer in silence, than make a noise to cause the Philistines to triumph. Do not let go your expectation of a baptism from above. May you be supported in this and every other trial! Farewell!

"J. FLETCHER."

Two days later, Fletcher wrote again to Benson as follows:—

"*January* 9, 1771.

"I am determined to stand or fall with the liberty of the College. As I entered it a free place, I must quit it the moment it is a harbour for party spirit.

"As I am resolved to clear up this matter or quit my province, I beg you will help me to as many *facts* and *words*, *truly done*, and *really spoken*, as you can; whereby I may show that false reports, groundless suspicions, party spirit against Mr. Wesley, arbitrary proceedings, and unscriptural impulses, hold the reins and manage affairs in the College; as also that the balance of opinions is not maintained, and Mr. Wesley's opinions are dreaded, and struck at, more than deadness of heart, and a wrong conduct.

---

[1] A clergyman, who, professing to be under serious impressions, had been permitted by her ladyship to stay a few weeks at the college; but was neither master nor student. Fletcher termed him "a bird of passage."

"So far as we can, let us keep this matter to ourselves. When you speak of it to others, rather endeavour to palliate than aggravate what has been wrong in your opposers. Remember that great lady has been an instrument of great good, and that there are great inconsistencies attending the greatest and best of men. Possess your soul in patience. See the salvation of God; and believe, though against hope, that light will spring out of darkness.

"I am, with concern for you and that poor College,

"Yours, in Jesus,

"J. FLETCHER."

On February 20, Fletcher set out for the College;[1] and, on his return to Madeley, he wrote to Wesley the following hitherto unpublished letter:—

"MADELEY, *March* 18, 1771.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I was sorry not to have had it in my power to meet you in Shropshire,[2] and give you, by word of mouth, an account of what passed at Lady Huntingdon's College respecting you, at my last visit there.

"The hasty admitting of subjects that did not appear to me proper; the sanguine hopes they would turn out against probability, the divisions at Brecknock and the Hay, and some things that I did not approve in Mr. Benson's dismission, gave me a disgust to the College. Nevertheless, I went to try to make the best of the matter; but I found at my arrival that the students had been armed by Mr. Shirley against the point I had, with some success, maintained when I was there before, namely, internal conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the heart by faith. He called it *perfection*, and as such baited it out of the place.

"I saw the College was no longer my place, as I was not likely to do or receive any good there, especially as Calvinism strongly prevailed. Under these circumstances, and humbling views of my insufficiency, I told my lady and all around me, I resigned the place of superintendent; nevertheless, I would stay awhile to supply the want of a master.

"In the meantime, an extract of your last Minutes was sent to my lady, who wept much over it, through an honest fear that you had fairly and fully given up the grand point of the Methodists, free justification, *articulum stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ*. The heresy appeared horrible, worth being publicly opposed, and such as a true believer ought to be ready to burn against. I tried to soften matters, but in vain. The students were commanded to write their sentiments upon your doctrine of salvation by works, working for life, the merit of works, etc.; and whoever did not fully disavow it, was to quit the College. I wrote among the rest, and showed the absurdity of inferring from these Minutes that you had renounced the Protestant doctrine and the atonement. I defended your sentiments, by explaining them as I have heard you do, and only blamed the unguarded and not sufficiently explicit manner in which they were worded. I concluded by saying, that, as, after Lady Huntingdon's declaration, I could no longer stay in the College, but as an intruder, I *absolutely* resigned my place, as I must appear to all around as great a heretic as yourself.

---

[1] "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. iii., p. 88.

[2] Wesley was at Wem only three days before this letter was written.

"This step had a better effect than I expected. My lady weighed with candour what I had advanced, though she thought it too bad to be laid before the students. In short, I retired in peace and as peacemaker, the servant and no more the principal of the College. I advised Lady Huntingdon to choose a moderate Calvinist in my place, and recommended Mr. Rowland Hill. The College will take quite a Calvinist turn, and an itinerant ministry will go out of it to feed the Church of God of that sentimental denomination. I strongly recommended them to set fire to the harvest of the Philistines, and not to that of their fellow Israelites who cannot pronounce Shibboleth in their way. My lady seemed quite disposed for peace last Friday;[1] and she will write to you to beg you will explain yourself upon the Minutes, that she and the College may see you are not *an enemy to grace*, and may be friends at a distance, instead of open adversaries.

"And now, my dear Sir, I beseech you to put on all the bowels of mercy and condescension that are in Christ, to hope the College and its foundress mean well; and give them all the satisfaction you can. I need not bring to your remembrance the words of the Apostle, 'As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' I trust they are graven on your heart, and that, should war ensue, your moderation will still appear to all men. The points that will most stop the mouth of our friend are the total fall of man, and his utter inability to do any good of himself; the absolute necessity of the grace and Spirit of God to raise even a good thought or desire in the heart; the Lord rewarding no work, or accepting of none, but so far as they proceed from His preventing, convincing, and converting grace; the blood and righteousness of Christ being the sole meritorious cause of our salvation, and the only spring of all acceptable works, whether we do them spontaneously from life or for more abundant life.

"I look upon Lady Huntingdon as an eminent servant of God, an honest, gracious person, but not above the reach of prejudice; and where prejudice misleads her, her warm heart makes her go rather too fast. It is in your power greatly to break, if not altogether to remove, the prejudice she has conceived against you, and to become all things to her, that you may not cause her to stumble in the greatness of her zeal for the Lord. The best way to get the Calvinists to allow us *something*, is to grant them *all* we possibly can.

---

[1] The day Wesley was at Wem, namely, March 15.

"As your enemies will particularly watch your writings and sermons, and Satan your heart to find an occasion against you by self-righteousness and dependence upon your great works, my prayer is that you may fully disappoint them, by guarding the Gospel truth in your own heart and life, and doctrine, as much from the legal as the antinomian extreme, between which it invariably lies.

"With respect to me, I am not yet a Christian in the full sense of the word; but I follow after, if so be I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ. Take no notice of my scrawl. Pray for, and direct, Rev. and dear Sir, your affectionate friend and unworthy servant in Christ,

"J. FLETCHER.

"To
"The Rev. Mr. John Wesley,
"At the Octagone,
"Chester." (Salop postmark.)

Four days after the date of this letter, Fletcher wrote to Benson, giving him some of the particulars just recited; but also mentioning other facts, too interesting and important to be omitted here.

"*March* 22, 1771.

"MY DEAR FRIEND.—On my arrival at the College, I found all very quiet, I fear through the enemy keeping his goods in peace. While I preached the next day, I found myself as much shackled as ever I was in my life; and, after private prayer, I concluded I was not in my place. The same day[1] I resigned my office to my lady; and, on Wednesday, to the students and the Lord. Nevertheless, I went on as usual, only I had no heart to give little charges to the students, as before. I should possibly have got over it as a temptation, if several circumstances had not confirmed me in my design. Two I shall mention. When Mr. Shirley was at the College, what you had written upon the 'baptism of the Holy Ghost' was taken to pieces. Mr. Shirley maintained that the prophecy of Joel (Acts ii.) had its complete fulfilment on the day of Pentecost; and thus he turned the stream of living waters into imperceptible dews, *nemine contradicente*, except two, who made one or two feeble objections; so that the point was, in my judgment, turned out of the College after you, and was abused under the name of 'Perfection. This showed I was not likely to receive or do any good there.

"Some days after my arrival, however, I preached the good old doctrine before my Lady and Mr. H——. The latter also talked of imperceptible influences, and the former thanked me; but, in my apprehension, spoiled all by going to the College the next day, to give a charge partly against *Perfection*, in my absence.

---

[1] Wesley says he "*spent the day* in fasting and prayer." (Wesley's Works, vol. vii., p. 416.)

"Last Friday, I left them all in peace, the *servant*, but no more the *president of the College*. My lady behaved with great candour and condescension towards me in the affair. As for you, you are still out of her books, and are likely so to continue. Your last letters have only thrown oil on the fire. All was seen in the same light in which Mr. Wesley's letter appeared. You were accused of having alienated my heart from the College, but I have cleared you.

"I rejoice that your desires after a larger measure of the Holy Spirit increase. Part rather with your heart's blood than with them. Let me meet you at the throne of grace; and send me word how you dispose of yourself. If you are at a loss for a prophet's room, remember I have one here.

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

To these letters must be added a verbatim copy of an important document, altogether in Fletcher's own handwriting, and never published until now.

"An account of John Fletcher's case, with the reasons that have induced him to resign the superintendency of the Countess of Huntingdon's College in Wales.

"I was first connected with Mr. Wesley, under whom, for love and gratitude's sake, I occasionally laboured some years.

"By Mr. C. Wesley I had the honour of being presented to Lady Huntingdon, who kindly admitted me to the office of a private chaplain, and granted me full leave to assist my old friends as often as I would.

"By means of her ladyship I was afterwards introduced to Mr. Whitefield, and had the honour of assisting him also both in London and Bristol, and found myself peculiarly happy in showing, by my equal readiness to throw my mite of assistance where it was accepted, that though I was the Lord's free man I delighted to be the common servant of all. I was glad also to have from time to time an opportunity of bearing a kind of practical testimony against the spirit of party and division, which, to my great grief, crumbled the Church of Christ around me.

"After taking a dangerous turn into the doctrines of election and reprobation, my sentiments settled at last into the anti-Calvinist way, in which Mr. Wesley was rooted. Notwithstanding this, it became a steady, invariable point with me never to be so attached to his, or any one party, as to be shy of, much less break with another.

"I had soon an opportunity of being closely tried in my spirit of catholic love. Mr. Maxfield separated from his and my old friend Mr. Wesley. I thought him rather in the wrong, and Mr. Wesley was my oldest acquaintance. Notwithstanding, I ventured upon the loss of his friendship, and of my connection with him, by publicly assisting Mr. Maxfield when the breach between them was widest, and the press groaned under the unkind productions of their unhappy division.[1] Though I touched Mr. Wesley's friendship in the tenderest part, he bore with me, and his patience increased my regard for him; nor is it at all abated now, though I have had little opportunity to show it him, having hardly exchanged one or two letters with him these many years.

---

[1] Benson's Life, by Macdonald.

"Soon after Lady Huntingdon founded her College, and partly by her unmerited esteem, partly by Providence, and partly by my desire to be a Gibeonite to God's people and hew wood if I could not draw water, I was brought to have a principal share in the management of it. The free spirit that breathed in the noble foundress's proposals, and the general terms of admittance, suited my catholic taste, and the liberty of sentiment granted to all that firmly maintained our total fall in Adam, attached me no less to the institution than its excellence and the prospect of its usefulness.

"Scruples nevertheless rose in my mind. The first was a fear lest improper subjects, persons destitute either of grace or gifts, perhaps of both, were admitted with the greatest readiness, and kept upon the foundation with the most sanguine hopes that a day of Pentecost would make them what they did not appear to me to be as yet—Christians and preachers. Flattering myself that it would be so, after some modest expostulations I submitted my judgment to that of the noble foundress, whose light I think in general as superior to mine as is her rank and grace.

"The Brecknock division[2] broke out. I suddenly tried to prevent it, but it took place, and secretly wounded my catholic spirit. Nevertheless, hopes that the Lord might overrule it for good soon healed the wound. This brought on a rupture between my two dear and honoured friends, the foundress of the college and Mr. Wesley. An unkind, though I hope well-meant letter, was wrote on the occasion by one, and was unkindly received, yea, looked upon as highly insulting, by the other. I saw the advantage of the enemy. I blamed, and yet I loved

---

[1] After many unhappy contentions, and much forbearance on Wesley's part, Thomas Maxfield seceded from Wesley in 1763. Maxfield has been far more highly honoured in Methodist histories and biographies than his merits warranted.

[2] I have failed in my endeavour to ascertain what is meant by the "Brecknock division." There can be no doubt, however, that Wesley met with great annoyance in that part of Wales. Previous to the opening of Trevecca College, he wrote:—

"1767. September 2.—I found the work of God in Pembrokeshire had been exceedingly hindered, chiefly by Mr. Davies's preachers, who had continually inveighed against ours, and thereby frightened abundance of people from hearing or coming near them. This had sometimes provoked them to retort, which always made a bad matter worse. The advice, therefore, which I gave them was:—1. Let all the people sacredly abstain from backbiting, tale-bearing, evil-speaking. 2. Let all our preachers abstain from returning railing for railing, either in public or them both. Where I could not soften matters I remained neuter. Hence, however, arose a difficulty how I should be faithful to my lady without being unfaithful to Mr. Wesley. Meantime, the prejudice seemed to me to rise, and somewhat sowed the seeds of the Hay division. Mr. Benson's dismission followed, and though I hope it was from the Lord, yet I could not help blaming the manner in which it was conducted.

"Lady Huntingdon said on the occasion, nobody that held Mr. Wesley's opinions should stay in the College; every Arminian should quit the place. This wounded again my catholic spirit, and appeared to me a breach of the privilege most solemnly granted to the members of the College at the opening of it. I thought that my lady had no right to impose such a law—a law so contrary to her first proposals—till it had received a proper sanction by a majority of the votes both of masters and students, and till leave had been granted to those who could not in conscience come into it to withdraw quietly, without the odium of an expulsion. I observed that if this was the case, I looked upon myself as discharged, because I for one could no more believe that Christ did not taste death for every man, than I could believe God was not truth and love; and because all the sentiments of Mr. Wesley obnoxious to the Calvinist, except perfection, are inseparably connected with general redemption.

"With regard to perfection itself, I believe that when Mr. Wesley is altogether consistent upon that subject, he means absolutely nothing by it but the full cluster of Gospel blessings, which Lady Huntingdon so warmly presses the students to pursue; namely, Gospel faith, the immediate revelation of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of adoption, the kingdom that cannot be moved, the element of forgiving love, deep and uninterrupted poverty of spirit, and, in a word, a standing upon Mount Sion and enjoying its great and glorious privileges. And I am fully persuaded that, in this respect, there is more misunderstanding between my lady and Mr. Wesley about words and modes of expression than about things and essential principles. All the difference between them seems to *me* to consist in this: my lady is more for looking to the misery and depth of the fall; Mr. Wesley more for considering the power and effects of the recovery. My lady speaks glorious

---

in private, as well as from disputing. 3. Let them never preach controversy, but plain, practical, and experimental religion."

A year and a half after Fletcher left Trevecca, Wesley wrote again in his journal:—

"1772. August 14.—About noon, at the request of my old friend Howell Harris, I preached at Trevecca, on the strait gate, and we found our hearts knit together as at the beginning. He said, 'I have borne with these pert, ignorant young men, vulgarly called students, till I cannot in conscience bear any longer. They preach barefaced reprobation, and so broad antinomianism, that I have been constrained to oppose them to the face, even in the public congregation.' It is no wonder they should preach thus. What better can be expected from raw lads of little understanding, little learning, and no experience?"

things of free grace; and Mr. Wesley inculcates the glorious use we ought to make of it. Both appear to me to maintain one and the same truth, and to guard it; my lady against the Legalists, Mr. Wesley against the Antinomians. If, therefore, they do not understand one another, and fall out by the way, I shall think it is a great pity, and shall continue to be, at least in my heart, the loving servant of both; though both will possibly think me prejudiced for not seeing just as they do.

"I was also grieved that my lady should have received for truth so absurd an imagination as that of Mr. Wesley being willing to give £100 a-year to a rigid Calvinist in bondage, who just read prayers with a Welsh accent, and that wise Benson made the foolish proposal to him, when Benson, to my certain knowledge, feared his head was at times a little affected. And I began to fear lest my lady should, upon the most improbable assertions, receive unfavourable impressions against me, as she had done against her old friend Mr. Wesley, especially as my particular regard for him was still the same.

"Be that as it will, my regard for Lady Huntingdon and the students made me send her ladyship my sentimental creed, that, if she did not disapprove of it, I might come to the College; and I came, to my thinking and feeling, as free and as happy as ever, and was quite free on the Saturday evening and the next morning till noon, when the little commission and authority I had to exhort the students was quite taken away from me. As I preached in the chapel, an uncommon weight came upon me on a sudden, and it was not without much difficulty that I struggled under it through the rest of my sermon. As soon as the service was over, I retired to my room in very great heaviness and distress. I saw in the clearest light that I was not in my place, and must no longer preside in the College. From that time, I had no heart to speak to the students on the things of God. So clear and strong was my conviction that I mentioned it directly to Mr. Howell Harris, and that very evening to my lady, and to all the students on the next Wednesday; and as I concluded our morning meeting with prayer, I was led solemnly upon my knees to resign my charge to God, and to pray for a proper person to preside in my place.

"Nevertheless my high regard for my lady, and my love for the students, prevented me from being faithful to my conviction, and I would have quenched it, if I had been able. But several things happened which gave me courage to be faithful.

"Lady Huntingdon showed me a letter to Hook, which she had read to the students; and, though I admired the honesty and impartiality that appeared in it, I afterwards thought hard of that expression, that every one who held eternal justification must quit the College. This appeared to me as severe upon consistent Calvinists, as the like expression before upon consistent Arminians, as, I believe, every Predestinarian, who will not contradict himself, must hold himself eternally justified in God's sight.

"I had reason to fear Mr. Shirley, that great minister whom I honour much in the Lord, had said he would oppose through the world the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which I am bound in conscience to maintain among all professors, especially in the College. From these different views of things, I saw difficulties would perpetually arise to her ladyship, the College, and myself.

"I was also grieved that when he tried his well-meant zeal (though it was not, in my judgment, zeal according to knowledge) to explode the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and laugh it out of the College, after having dressed it in a fool's coat and called it Perfection, most of the students had tamely allowed him that Joel's prophecy was entirely fulfilled upon the hundred and twenty disciples on the day of Pentecost, that believers are to grow in grace by imperceptible dews, and that we can do very well without a remarkable shower of grace and Divine effusion of power, opening in us the well of living water that is to flow to everlasting life.

"As it appeared to me they had, in a good degree, given up their little expectation of this Gospel blessing, and renounced the grand point which I apprehended was to be firmly maintained and vigorously pursued in the College, I did not feel the same liberty with them in prayer, and found that, as matters were and appeared likely to continue, my convictions and desires would rather be damped than cherished among them.

"Nor, indeed, did I see, upon this new plan, any advantage this College was to have more than the academy at Abergavenny, itinerancy excepted; so that I feared many would get into the habit of preaching by rote, and of talking of the power without heartily waiting for it, which made me give up my hopes that those who have not gifts should ever be useful preachers, as a day of Pentecost and power from on high can alone supply the want of them.

"My lady, likewise, appeared to me so excessively afraid of Perfection, that she seemed to take umbrage at a harmless expression I had used in a letter hastily written to a friend, '*The fiery baptism will burn up self*,'—an expression which I had caught from Mr. Harris, who frequently uses it, though no one will accuse him of befriending Mr. Wesley's doctrine of Perfection. Whatsoever he means by it, I mean nothing but to convey the idea of a power that enables us to say, with a tolerable degree of propriety, as St. Paul, 'I live not, but Christ lives in me;' and I saw that, if I was faithful to my light, misapprehensions of the like kind, and well or ill grounded fears, would perpetually arise.

"But what weighed most with me, next to what passed in my heart, the third Sunday in Lent, was the strong light in which I saw the great difficulty arising from the difference of sentiments between the students and myself. I had frequently observed that, if I tried to stir up those who appeared to be carnally secure, or spiritually asleep on their soft doctrinal pillows, they directly fancied I aimed at robbing them of one of their jewels, the doctrine of perseverance, though the Searcher of hearts knows I had not the least thought about it. By the same stratagem of the enemy, when I exhorted loiterers to leave the things that are behind, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ, they imagined I wanted to drive them to the brink of some horrible precipice, or into the jaws of some monster called Perfection, in which notion they were possibly confirmed not only by Mr. Shirley's positive assertions, but by frequent hints thrown out by her ladyship herself upon the danger of that imaginary bugbear. Alas! how needless it is to give charges against sinless Perfection to young men who believe no such thing is to be attained, and who live mostly under the power of the carnal mind. What must be the consequence if grace does not interpose? What, but a settling upon the lees of nature and formality, and a singing of a soft requiem to the drowsy hearts of those who are not really alive to God? What makes me think so, is the frequent opportunities I have had to observe that a word which may too indirectly countenance sin, by the craft and power of Satan and the prevalence of natural corruption, goes farther than twenty directly and powerfully thundered against it.

"Again. The light of most Calvinists is such that they cannot believe a man knows anything of free grace who does not enter into all their sentiments. Of this, a moderate one gave me lately a particular instance, by telling me point blank, I was in a damnable heresy, and never knew anything of myself or of true grace, because I had said, sinners perish for resisting and quenching the Spirit of grace. Hence, I conclude, and not without a premise, that it would be as ridiculous in me to expect the majority of students to follow my directions, as it would be to hope that young men who have good eyes should follow a person whom they believe almost if not altogether blind.

"Things appeared to me in this light, when the uneasiness of my lady occasioned by Mr. Wesley's Minutes showed itself. I admired her zeal for the grand truths of the Gospel. Appearances were for her, and I could not excuse Mr. Wesley's unguarded expressions, any more than my lady's great warmth against them; her ladyship having mentioned again and again that they were horrible and abominable, and that she must burn against them, and at last added, that, whosoever in the College did not fully and without any evasion disavow them should not stay in her College, etc. Accordingly, an order came for the students and masters to write their sentiments upon them. I thought I would not lay that burden upon others without touching it myself, and, following the light in which I could see and trace Mr. Wesley's doctrines from a long acquaintance with his sentiments, I blamed the unguarded and not sufficiently explicit manner in which they were worded, but approving the doctrines themselves as agreeable to what appears to me the analogy of faith. All the College, I suppose, rose with one voice against them, which must make me appear strangely heterodox, if not altogether a heretic worse than Mr. Wesley. This consideration, together with my lady's repeated declaration that every student who did not disavow them should quit the College, gave me at last courage to do absolutely what I had done in a partial manner near a fortnight before, namely, to resign the office of Principal of the College, which I saw I could no longer discharge with honour, with a good conscience, or any probability of success.

"If I know anything of my own heart, I can truly say, I have not taken this step from pique or chagrin, nor from any supposed unkindness in her ladyship or the students, whose undeserved regard and peculiar respect for me have made me feel the greatest reluctance to comply with what I esteem the order of the Lord and the explicit dictate of my own conscience, confirmed by the train of circumstances which I have mentioned.

"My high esteem for her ladyship is not at all abated. My love to the students, and regard for the College are the same. Nay, I can truly say, my regard for them goads me away, as I see nothing but a scene of confusion, distraction, and jealousy if I stay. The whole of this affair appears to me to be from the Lord, and it is my sentiment, that, as the College has naturally been filled with Calvinists, is providentially founded near a Calvinist academy in Wales, a Calvinist country, an itinerant ministry is to go forth from it to feed chiefly the Church of God of that sentimental denomination. In order to this, a moderate, lively Calvinist must superintend, under the noble foundress, and, as a token that her ladyship is not dissatisfied with my conduct, I humbly beg she would give me leave to recommend my successor to her.

"Mr. Whitefield is dead; some of his forlorn congregation have already been blessed under the ministry of the students; who is more proper to head them than he whom the religious world begins to call the young Whitefield, Mr. Rowland Hill? His remarkable sufferings for Christ's sake entitle him to the honour of presiding over this work; and I hope the Lord will make him willing to accept an office for which he seems to be so well fitted by his popularity and success.

"If it be objected that he is young, I reply, he is older than Mr. Whitefield was when he set out upon his great errand, and that the warmth of his heart, the ripeness of his zeal, and the amazing steadiness of his conduct for years, under the greatest difficulty both at home and abroad, together with the many seals God has already given to His ministry in various parts of the kingdom, ought greatly to turn the scale in his favour. And, indeed, what is an old Saul to a young David? And who deserves most the name and honour of a father? He, or myself? Without hesitating, I answer Mr. Rowland Hill, who has perhaps begotten more children to God in one discourse than I have in all my poor labour these fourteen years."

This long document is endorsed "Letter to Lady Huntingdon." It would be easy to make it the text for a long sermon; but want of space forbids the attempt to do this. Besides, intelligent readers are quite competent to form just opinions respecting it. Suffice it to say, that it is of high importance, as containing, by far, the fullest account ever published of the reasons why Fletcher took a step which led to great events he never contemplated. Had he continued to be the Superintendent of the Trevecca College, it is probable that the Calvinian controversy would not have grown to such wide dimensions. That, however, is not a proof of imprudence on Fletcher's part; for, as every one who knows the history of that controversy is well aware, it was impossible for the great religious movement of the last century to proceed without the doctrines in Wesley's Minutes being thoroughly examined, discussed, and settled.

Wesley preached his sermon on the death of Whitefield on November 18, 1770. Six weeks afterwards, it was respectfully attacked in the January number of the Calvinists' periodical, the *Gospel Magazine.* Two months later, the same magazine made a furious assault on Walter Sellon's "Defence of God's Sovereignty," stigmatizing it as "A mite of reprobate silver, cast into the *Foundery*, and coming out thence, bearing the impress of that pride, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency, natural to men in their fallen unrenewed state." "This performance," continues the reviewer, "is extolled to the very skies by the Arminians. It is calculated for their meridian, and well establishes the haughty system of their own works and faithfulness, in opposition to the grace of the Gospel, and the faithfulness of a covenant God, in the finished salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ."

In May, the same periodical printed Wesley's "Minutes," and branded them as "the very doctrines of Popery, yea, of Popery unmasked." The number for the month of June contained an article of twelve pages, entitled, "A Comment or Paraphrase on the Extract from the Minutes of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, etc." The temper and the unfairness of the article may be judged by the paraphrase on the first Minute, "*Take heed to your doctrine.*" That is, remarks the commentator,—

> "Beware, in your preaching, of ascribing the whole and sole glory of salvation, from first to last, to the free unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. Be cautious how you sink man below his dignity, rob him of his excellency, strip him of the power of His free-will and abilities to perform his part in the work of salvation, and so deprive him of all trust in himself, hope from himself, and boasting of himself; for hence will be an end of self-seeking, self-righteousness, and self-soothing. Then would he sink into self-despair. Take heed to this."

Meanwhile, Fletcher wrote to Wesley as follows:—

"MADELEY, *June* 24, 1771.'

"DEAR SIR,—When I left Wales, where I had stood in the gap for peace, I thought my poor endeavours were not altogether vain. Lady Huntingdon said she would write civilly to you, and desire you to explain yourself about your 'Minutes.' I suppose you have not heard from her, for she wrote me word, since then, that she believed she must not meddle in the affair. At least, that is what I made of her letter. Upon receiving yours from Chester, I cut off that part of it where you expressed your belief of what is eminently called by us the doctrine of free grace, and sent it to the College, with a desire it might be sent to Lady Huntingdon. She has returned it to me, with a letter, in which she expresses the greatest disapprobation of it. The purport of her letter is, to charge you with tergiversation, and me with being the dupe of your impositions. She has also written in stronger terms to her College.

"Things I hoped would have remained there; but how am I surprised and grieved to see zeal borrowing the horn of discord, and sounding an alarm throughout the religious world against you. Mr. Hatton called upon me last night, and showed me a printed circular, which, I suppose, is, or will be, sent to the serious clergy and laity throughout the land. I have received none, as I have lost, I suppose, my reputation of being a '*real Protestant*,' by what I wrote upon your 'Minutes' in Wales.

"This is an exact copy of the printed letter—

"'SIR,—Whereas Mr. Wesley's Conference is to be held at Bristol, on Tuesday, the 6th of August next, it is proposed by Lady Huntingdon and many other Christian friends (real Protestants), to have a meeting at Bristol at the same time, of such principal persons, both clergy and laity, who disapprove of the underwritten 'Minutes;' and, as the same are thought injurious to the very *fundamental* principles of Christianity, it is further proposed that they go in a body to the said Conference, and insist upon a formal recantation of the said Minutes; and, in case of a refusal, that they sign and publish their protest against them. Your presence, Sir, on this occasion, is particularly requested; but, if it should not suit your convenience to be there, it is desired that you will transmit your sentiments on the subject to such persons as you think proper to produce them. It is submitted to you, whether it would not be right, in the opposition to be made to such a *dreadful heresy*, to recommend it to as many of your Christian friends, as well of the dissenters as of the Established Church, as you can prevail on to be there, the cause being of so public a nature.

"'I am, Sir, your obedient servant,—WALTER SHIRLEY.

"'P.S.—Your answer is desired, directed to the Countess of Huntingdon; or the Rev. Mr. Shirley; or John Lloyd, Esq., in Bath; or Mr.

---

[1] This letter is inserted in the "Life and Times of Wesley," where it was published for the *first* time. It is reproduced here, because Fletcher's life would not be complete without it.—L. T.

James Ireland, merchant, Bristol; or to Thomas Powis, Esq., at Berwick, near Shrewsbury; or to Richard Hill, Esq., at Hawkstone, near Whitchurch, Shropshire. Lodgings will be provided. Inquire at Mr. Ireland's, Bristol.'

"I think it my duty, dear Sir, to give you the earliest intelligence of this bold onset, and to assure you that, upon the evangelical principles mentioned in your last letter to me, I, for one, shall be glad to stand by you and your doctrine to the last, hoping that you will gladly remove stumbling-blocks out of the way of the weak, and alter such expressions as may create prejudice in the hearts of those who are inclined to admit it.

"I write to Mr. Shirley to expostulate with him, and to request him to call in his circular letter. He is the last man that should attack you. His sermons contain propositions much more heretical and anti-Calvinistical than your 'Minutes.' If my letters have not the desired effect, I shall probably, if you approve of them and correct them, make them public for your justification.

"I find Mr. Ireland is to write to make you *tamely recant* without measuring swords, or breaking a pike with our *real Protestants*. I wrote to him also.

"I am, dear Sir, your unworthy servant in the Gospel,
"JOHN FLETCHER.

"To the Rev. Mr. John Wesley,
"At his Preaching House in Dublin,
"Ireland."

Lady Huntingdon did not write to Wesley, but he wrote a long and faithful letter to her, dated June 19, 1771, in which he insisted that the doctrines he preached now were the same as he had preached for above thirty years.[1]

Shirley did not "call in his circular letter." It would have been more to the honour of himself and his friends had he done so; for, when Wesley's Conference assembled on August 6, the response to it was ridiculous. Of all "the serious clergy and laity throughout the land," only Shirley himself, and the Rev. Cradock Glascott, and the Rev. Mr. Owen, ministers officiating in the Countess of Huntingdon's chapels, together with Messrs. Lloyd, Ireland, and Winter, and two students (!) from Trevecca College attended. After what had taken place, Wesley, without arrogance, might have disdained these insignificant self-elected deputies; but he graciously allowed them to enter his Conference. First of all, Wesley prayed; then Shirley asked if the letters[1] of himself and the Countess of Huntingdon had been read to the Conference; and, being answered in the negative, he asked leave to read them himself, which was granted. A long conversation followed, and then Shirley produced a written declaration which he wished the Conference to sign. Wesley examined it, and made some alterations, which Shirley says were "not very material;" and then Wesley and fifty-three of his itinerant preachers appended to it their signatures. The declaration was as follows:—

---

[1] "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. iii., p. 93.

> "Whereas the doctrinal points in the Minutes of a Conference, held in London, August 7, 1770, have been understood to favour justification by works; now the Rev. John Wesley and others assembled in Conference, do declare that we had no such meaning, and that we abhor the doctrine of Justification by Works as a most perilous and abominable doctrine: and, as the said Minutes are not sufficiently guarded in the way they are expressed, we hereby solemnly declare, in the sight of God, that we have no trust or confidence but in the alone merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for Justification or Salvation, either in life, death, or the day of judgment: and, though no one is a real Christian believer, (and consequently cannot be saved) who doth not good works, where there is time and opportunity, yet our works have no part in meriting or purchasing our salvation from first to last, either in whole or in part."

This declaration being signed by Wesley and all the Itinerant Preachers present (except Thomas Olivers), Shirley was required "to make some public acknowledgment that he had mistaken the meaning of the 'Minutes.'" At first he hesitated, but, "a few days afterwards, sent Wesley the following message, with which," says Shirley, "he was very well pleased":—

> "Mr. Shirley's Christian respects wait on Mr. Wesley. The declaration agreed to in Conference August 8, 1771, has convinced Mr. Shirley he had mistaken the meaning of the doctrinal points in the Minutes of

---

[1] The letter of the Countess, dated "August 2, 1771," in substance was an apology for the apparently presumptuous way in which she and her friends had proposed to invade Wesley's Conference; accompanied with an excuse founded on the fact that they regarded Wesley's "Minutes," of 1770, as "repugnant to Scripture, the whole plan of man's salvation under the new covenant of grace, and also to the clear meaning of our Established Church, as well as to that of all other Protestant Churches." Shirley's letter was to the same effect. (See Shirley's "Narrative of the Principal Circumstances relative to the Rev Mr. Wesley's late Conference, held in Bristol, August 6, 1771.")

the Conference, held in London August 7, 1770; and he hereby wishes to testify the full satisfaction he has in the said declaration, and his hearty concurrence and agreement with the same."

It might have been thought that here the fracas would have ended; and so, perhaps, it would, had it not been for an incident which must now be mentioned.

Fletcher had already written his "First Check to Antinomianism." It was finished on July 29,[1] and Wesley immediately put it into the hands of his printer, William Pine, of Bristol, to be printed and published; and the manuscript was being set up in type at the very time that Shirley and his friends were at Wesley's Conference. The Conference began on Tuesday, August 6. Wesley writes:—

> "We had more preachers than usual at the Conference, in consequence of Mr. Shirley's circular letter. At ten on *Thursday* morning, he came with nine or ten of his friends. We conversed freely for about two hours, and I believe they were satisfied that we were not so 'dreadful heretics' as they imagined, but were tolerably sound in the faith."[2]

The next day, Friday, August 9, Shirley was informed that Fletcher's manuscript was being printed. He and his friends appealed to Wesley to stop the press. Mr. Ireland, in particular, who had already written to Fletcher an account of the preceding day's amicable proceedings, entreated Wesley to wait till he (Ireland) could receive an answer to his letter. He ventured to assure Wesley that if Fletcher were upon the spot he would suppress the publication; and he himself offered to defray all the expense that had been incurred. Wesley answered, "I will consider it;" and, at the same time, he told his visitors that "he had corrected all the *tart* expressions in" the manuscript.[3]

---

[1] It is a notable fact that Wesley had spent the three previous days with Fletcher. Hence the following from Wesley's Journal:—

"1771. *Friday*, July 26. I went on to Shrewsbury, where Mr. Fletcher met me.—*Sunday*, 28. I preached at Madeley, morning and afternoon. The church would not near contain the congregation; but the window near the pulpit being open, those without could hear as well as those within.—*Monday*, 29. I went on to Worcester."

Probably Wesley took Fletcher's manuscript away with him.

[2] Wesley's Journal.

[3] Shirley's "Narrative."

Wesley spent Saturday and Sunday in Bristol; and then, on Monday, August 12, he "set out for Wales." Three days afterwards, Mr. Ireland received a letter from Fletcher, who wrote:—

"I feel for poor dear Mr. Shirley, whom I have (considering the present circumstances) treated too severely in my 'Vindication of the Minutes.' My dear Sir, what must be done? I am ready to defray, by selling to my last shirt, the expense of the printing of my Vindication, and suppress it. Direct me, dear Sir. Consult with Mr. Shirley and Mr. Wesley about the matter. Be persuaded I am ready to do everything that will be brotherly in this unhappy affair."[1]

Wesley having departed from Bristol, Mr. Ireland at once went to Mr. Pine, the printer, and showed him Fletcher's letter; and the same evening Mr. Pine communicated its contents to the Bristol preachers. The next morning, Friday, August 16, Mr. Ireland sent to the preachers a *copy* of Fletcher's letter; and, in a letter from himself, told them that Fletcher "supposed the book was out; but, even in that case, he wished it to be suppressed." Mr. Ireland entreated them to defer the publication till they had further authority from Fletcher and Wesley, "and engaged to be accountable for every consequence."[2]

While Mr. Ireland was making these strenuous efforts to suppress the publication, Wesley wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon as follows:—

"1771. August 14.—When I received your ladyship's letter of the 2nd inst., I immediately saw that it required an answer, only I waited till the hurry of Conference was over, that I might do nothing rashly. I know your ladyship would not servilely 'deny the truth;' neither would I; especially that great truth, justification by faith, for which I have given up all my worldly hopes, my friends, my reputation; yea, for which I have so often hazarded my life, and by the grace of God will do again. The principles established in the '*Minutes*' I apprehend to be no way contrary to this; or to that faith which was once delivered to the saints. I believe whoever calmly considers Mr. Fletcher's letters will be convinced of this. I fear, therefore, 'zeal against those principles' is no less than zeal against the truth, and against the *honour* of our Lord. The preservation of His honour appears so sacred to me, and has done for above these forty years, that I have counted, and do count, all things loss in comparison of it. But till Mr. Fletcher's printed letters are answered, I must think everything spoken against those '*Minutes*' is totally destructive of *His honour*, and a palpable affront to Him both as our Prophet and Priest, but more especially as our King. Those letters, therefore, which could not be suppressed without betraying the honour of our Lord, largely prove that the '*Minutes*' lay no other foundation than that which is laid in Scripture, and which I have been laying, and teaching others to lay, for between thirty and forty years. Indeed, it would be amazing that God should at this day prosper my labours, as much if not more than ever, by convincing as well as converting sinners, if I was '*establishing another foundation, repugnant to the whole plan of man's salvation under the covenant of grace, as well as the clear meaning of our Established Church and all other Protestant Churches.*' This is a charge indeed! But I plead, not guilty; and till it is proved upon me, I must subscribe myself, my dear lady, your ladyship's affectionate but much injured servant,

---

[1] Shirley's "Narrative."

[2] *Ibid.*

"JOHN WESLEY."[1]

Thus, by Wesley's firmness, Fletcher's manuscript, without any delay, was printed and published. Its title was, "A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Last Minutes: Occasioned by a circular printed Letter, inviting principal Persons, both Clergy and Laity, as well of the Dissenters as of the Established Church, who disapprove of those Minutes, to oppose them in a Body, as a dreadful Heresy: And designed to remove Prejudice, check Rashness, promote Forbearance, defend the Character of an eminent Minister of Christ, and prevent some important Scriptural Truths from being hastily branded as heretical. In Five Letters, to the Hon and Rev. Author of the Circular Letter. By a Lover of Quietness and Liberty of Conscience. Bristol: Printed by W. Pine, in Wine Street, 1771." 12mo., 98 pp.

The publication roused again the Hon. and Rev. Walter Shirley, who immediately prepared and published "A Narrative of the principal Circumstances relative to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's late Conference, held in Bristol, August the 6th, 1771, at which the Rev. Mr. Shirley, and others, his Friends, were present. With a Declaration then agreed to by Mr. Wesley, and Fifty-three of the Preachers in Connection with him. In a Letter to a Friend. By the Rev. Mr. Shirley. Bath: 1771." 12mo., 24 pp.

---

[1] Whitehead's "Life of Wesley," vol. ii., p. 350.

Upon the whole, Mr. Shirley's "Narrative" was truthful, fair, and respectful. It is dated "Bath, September 12, 1771." He apprised Fletcher of its contents, and of his intention to publish it; and Fletcher, in reply, wrote the following letter, which completes the history of the commencement of the great Calvinistical controversy:—

"MADELEY, *September* 11, 1771.[1]

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—It is extremely proper, nay, it is highly necessary, that the public should be informed how much like a minister of the Prince of Peace, and a meek, humble, loving brother in the Gospel of Christ, you behaved at the Conference. Had I been there, I would gladly have taken upon me to proclaim these tidings of joy to the lovers of Zion's peace. Your conduct at that time of love is certainly the best excuse for the hasty step you had taken; as my desire of stopping my '*Vindication*,' upon hearing of it, is the best apology I can make for my severity to you.

"I am not averse at all, Sir, to your publishing the passages you mention out of my letters to Mr. Ireland. They show my peculiar love and respect for you, which I shall at all times think an honour; and, at this juncture, shall feel a peculiar pleasure to see proclaimed to the world. They apologize for my calling myself '*a lover of quietness*,' when I unfortunately prove *a son of contention;* and they demonstrate that I am not altogether void of the fear that becomes an awkward, inexperienced surgeon, when he ventures to open a vein in the arm of a person for whom he has the highest regard. How natural is it for him to tremble, lest by missing the intended vein, and pricking an unseen artery, he should have done irreparable mischief instead of an useful operation!

"But while you do me the kindness of publishing those passages, permit me, Sir, to do Mr. Wesley the justice of informing him, I had also written to Mr. Ireland, that, 'whether my *Letters* were suppressed or not, the '*Minutes*' *must* be vindicated,—that Mr. Wesley owed it to the Church, to the *real Protestants*, to all his Societies, and to his own aspersed character,—and that, after all, the controversy did not seem to me to be so much whether the '*Minutes*' should stand, as whether the Antinomian Gospel of Dr. Crisp[2] should prevail over the practical Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"I must also, Sir, beg leave to let my vindicated friend know, that, in the very letter where I so earnestly entreated Mr. Ireland to stop the publication of my Letters to you, and offered to take the whole expense of the impression upon myself, though I should be obliged to sell my last shirt to defray it, I added that, 'If they were published, I must look upon it as a *necessary evil*, or *misfortune*.' Which of the two words I used I do not justly recollect: a *misfortune* for you and me, who must appear inconsistent to the world;—you, Sir, with your Sermons,[1] and I with my Title-page; and nevertheless *necessary* to vindicate misrepresented truth, defend an eminent minister of Christ, and stem the torrent of Antinomianism.

---

[1] That there might be no misunderstanding between them, Fletcher, on the same day, sent Wesley "the substance, and almost the very words," of this letter to Shirley.

[2] The Rev. Tobias Crisp, D.D., a divine of the Church of England, born in London in 1600, and who died in 1643. He was educated at Eton, thence he removed to Cambridge, and afterwards to Oriel College, Oxford. At the age of twenty-seven, he was appointed Rector of Brinkworth, in Wiltshire. Early in life, he was a favourer of the doctrines of

"It may not be improper, also, to observe to you, Sir, that when I presented Mr. Wesley with my 'Vindication,' I begged he would correct it, and take away whatever might be unkind or too sharp: urging that though I meant no unkindness, I was not a proper judge of what I had written under peculiarly delicate and trying circumstances, as well as in a great hurry; and did not, therefore, dare to trust either my pen, my head, or my heart. He was no sooner gone" (from Bristol) "than I sent a letter after him to repeat and urge the same request; and he wrote me word, that he had 'expunged every tart expression.' *If he has* (for I have not yet seen what alterations his friendly pen has made) I am reconciled to the publication; and *that he has*, I have reason to hope from the letters of two judicious London friends, who calmed my fears, lest I should have treated you with unkindness.

"One of them says, 'I reverence Mr. Shirley for his candid acknowledgment of his hastiness in judging. I commend the Calvinists at the Conference for their justice to Mr. Wesley, and their acquiescence in the Declaration of the Preachers in connexion with him. But is that Declaration, however dispersed, a remedy adequate to the evil done, not only to Mr. Wesley, but to the cause and work of God? Several Calvinists, in eagerness of malice, had dispersed their calumnies through the three kingdoms. A truly excellent person herself,[2] in her mistaken zeal, had represented him as *a papist unmasked*, *a heretic*, *an apostate*. A clergyman of the first reputation informs me *a Poem on his Apostacy* is just coming out.[3] Letters have been sent to every serious Churchman and Dissenter through the land, together

---

Arminianism; afterwards, he became the champion of Antinomianism. His sermons, in three volumes, were printed after his death. It is said that, though the tenets he embraced seem to be a plea for licentiousness, he himself was remarkable for the purity and modesty of his manners.

[1] A few years ago, Shirley had published "Twelve Sermons, preached on several occasions," 12mo., 189 pp.

[2] Lady Huntingdon.

[3] This was published in the *Gospel Magazine*, in the same month as Wesley's Conference was held. It was signed "Cleon," and dated "London, June 17, 1771." Speaking of Wesley, "Cleon" says,—

"Pride prompts him on, and Satan now has gained
A conquest o'er perverted truth retained;
At best perverted, glaring now appears,
The pride of Rome, the lie of num'rous years."

with the *Gospel Magazine.* Great are the shoutings, "*And now that he lieth let him rise up no more.*" This is all the cry. His dearest friends and children are staggered, and scarce know what to think. You, in your corner, cannot conceive the mischief that has been done, and is still doing. But your letters, in the hand of Providence, may answer the good ends you proposed by writing them. You have not been too severe to dear Mr. Shirley, moderate Calvinists themselves being judges, but very kind and friendly to set a good mistaken man right, and probably to preserve him from the like rashness as long as he lives. Be not troubled, therefore, but cast your care upon the Lord.'

"My other friend says, 'Considering what harm the Circular Letter has done, and what a useless satisfaction Mr. Shirley has given by his vague acknowledgment, it is no more than just and equitable that your Letters should be published.'

"Now, Sir, as I never saw that *acknowledgment*, nor the *softening corrections* made by Mr. Wesley in my 'Vindication;' as I was not informed of some of the above-mentioned particulars when I was so eager to prevent the publication of my Letters; and as I have reason to think that, through the desire of an immediate peace, the festering wound was rather skinned over than probed to the bottom,—all I can say about this publication is, what I wrote to our common friend, namely, that 'I must look upon it as a *necessary evil.*'

"I am glad, Sir, you do not direct your letter to Mr. Olivers,[1] who was so busy in publishing my 'Vindication;' for, by a letter I have just received from Bristol, I am informed he did not hear how desirous I was to call it in, till he had actually given out, before a whole congregation, it would be sold. Besides, he would have pleaded with smartness that he never approved of a patched-up peace,—that he bore his testimony against it at the time it was made,—and that he had a personal right to produce *my* arguments, since both parties refused to hear *his* at the Conference.

"If your Letter is friendly, Sir, and you print it in the same size as my 'Vindication,' I shall gladly buy £10 worth of the copies, and order them to be stitched with my 'Vindication,' and given gratis to the purchasers of it; as well to do you justice, as to convince the world that we make a loving war; and also to demonstrate how much I regard your respectable character, and honour your dear person. Mr. Wesley's heart is, I am persuaded, too full of brotherly love to deny me the pleasure of thus showing you how sincerely I am, Rev. and dear Sir, your obedient servant,

"JOHN FLETCHER."

The reader has now as full an account as can be given of the way in which the long and angry war between *Wesleyan* Methodism and *Calvinian* Methodism was begun. It is difficult to say, decidedly, who was to blame for it. Wesley had a perfect right—in fact, under existing circumstances, he was almost bound by duty—to publish his theological theses; but it was unfortunate that, to use the words of himself and his fifty-three preachers, "*they were not sufficiently guarded* in the way they were expressed."

---

[1] Thomas Olivers, who, for several years, corrected proof sheets for Wesley.

The Countess of Huntingdon and her nephew, the Hon. and Rev. Walter Shirley, had a perfect right to take counsel with their Calvinian friends respecting Wesley's "Minutes;" but it was offensive arrogance to propose to "*go in a body to* Wesley's *Conference, and insist upon a formal recantation of the said Minutes.*" Wesley was under no obligation to either Lady Huntingdon or Walter Shirley; and their issuing of the "Circular Letter" was pure impertinence, though, no doubt, they thought it a Christian duty.

Fletcher had a perfect right to explain and vindicate Wesley's 'Minutes,' and to send Wesley his manuscript to be printed and published; and Wesley had a perfect right to avail himself of this permission.

Mr. Ireland had a perfect right to entreat Wesley's printer to delay the publication till he (Ireland) received an answer to the letter he had sent to Fletcher; and Fletcher, though, perhaps, showing too much flexibility of purpose, displayed Christian kindness of the highest order in his reply; but that reply arrived in Bristol too late, for Wesley had already left for Wales, and Wesley's editor had publicly announced that the "Vindication" would be published. Besides, Fletcher himself, within five weeks after the time when Wesley's Conference was held, changed his opinion, told Mr. Ireland that "the 'Minutes' *must* be vindicated," and informed Shirley himself that he was "reconciled to the publication" of his manuscript.

Nothing more need be said. Indeed, all, in substance, is said that can be said; and it only remains to notice the 12mo pamphlet of 98 pages, that gave such huge offence, and led to such serious consequences. Fletcher presents:—

"I. A general view of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's doctrines.

"II. An account of the commendable design of his 'Minutes.'

"III. A vindication of the propositions which they contain, by arguments taken from Scripture, reason, and experience; and by quotations from eminent Calvinist divines, who have said the same things in different words."

On the first of these points, he writes:—

"Mr. Wesley is accused of dreadful heresy; and may not I, an old friend and acquaintance of his, be permitted to speak a word in his favour? This step, I fear, will cost me my reputation (if I have any), and involve me in the same condemnation with him, whose cause, together with that of truth, I design to plead: but when humanity prompts, gratitude calls, and friendship excites; when reason invites, justice demands, truth requires, and conscience summons; he does not deserve the name of a Christian friend, who, for any consideration, hesitates to vindicate what he esteems truth, and to stand by an aggrieved friend, brother, and father.

"1. For above these sixteen years, I have heard him frequently in his chapels, and sometimes in my church; and I have familiarly conversed and corresponded with him, and have often perused his numerous works in verse and prose; and I can truly say, that, during all that time, I have heard him, upon every proper occasion, steadily maintain the total fall of man in Adam, and his utter inability to recover himself, or take one step towards his recovery, '*without the grace of God preventing him, that he may have a good will, and working with him when he has that good will.*'

"2. I must likewise testify that he faithfully points out Christ as the only way of salvation; and strongly recommends faith as the only means of receiving Him, and all the benefits of His righteous life and meritorious death; and truth obliges me to declare, that he frequently expresses his detestation of the errors of modern Pharisees, who laugh at original sin, set up the power of fallen man, cry down the operations of God's Spirit, deny the absolute necessity of the blood and righteousness of Christ, and refuse Him the glory of all the good that may be found in Jew or Gentile. You will not without difficulty find in England, and perhaps in all the world, a minister who has borne more frequent testimonies, either from the pulpit or the press, against those dangerous errors.

"3. The next fundamental doctrine of Christianity is that of holiness of heart and life; and no one can here accuse Mr. Wesley of leaning to the Antinomian delusion, which '*makes void the law through*' a speculative and barren '*faith*': on the contrary, he appears to be peculiarly set for the defence of practical religion; for, instead of representing Christ as the minister of sin, he sets Him forth as a complete 'Saviour from sin.' Not satisfied to preach holiness begun, he preaches finished holiness, and calls believers to such a degree of heart-purifying faith, as may enable them continually to '*triumph in Christ,*' as being '*made to them sanctification,*' as well as '*righteousness.*' This he sometimes calls 'full sanctification,' the state of *fathers* in Christ, or '*the glorious liberty of the children of God:*' sometimes, a being '*strengthened, stablished, and settled;*' or '*being rooted and grounded in love:*' but most commonly he calls it, 'Christian *Perfection;*' a word which, though used by the Apostles in the same sense, cannot be used by him without raising the pity or indignation of one half of the religious world: some make it the subject of their pious sneers and godly lampoons; while others tell you roundly they 'abhor it above everything in the creation.'

"4. But this is not all: he holds also general redemption, and its necessary consequences, which some account '*dreadful heresies.*' He asserts, with St. Paul, that '*Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man;*' and this *grace* he calls '*free,*' as extending itself *freely* to all. Nor can he help expressing his surprise at those pious ministers, who maintain that the Saviour keeps His grace, as they suppose He kept His blood, from the greatest part of mankind, and yet engross to themselves the title of '*preachers of free grace.*'"

"5. As a consequence of the doctrine of general redemption, Mr. Wesley lays down two axioms, of which he never loses sight in his preaching. The first is, that '*All our salvation is of God in Christ,*' and therefore *of grace:* all opportunities, invitations, inclination, and power to believe being bestowed upon us of mere grace,—grace most absolutely free. But he proceeds farther; for, secondly, he asserts, with equal confidence, that, according to the Gospel dispensation, '*All our damnation is of ourselves,*' by our obstinate unbelief and avoidable unfaithfulness. He is persuaded the most complete system of divinity is that in which neither of those two axioms is superseded: it is bold and unscriptural to set up the one at the expense of the other."

These *extracts* from Fletcher's first letter are important, as showing what Fletcher conceived to be Wesley's fundamental doctrines; and it must be borne in mind, that, Wesley having read and revised Fletcher's manuscript, Fletcher's conception is stamped with Wesley's own authority.

Fletcher proceeds to explain and to defend Wesley's "Minutes," and to show they were greatly needed. He says:—

"Mr. Wesley's *design* was to guard his preachers and their hearers against Antinomian principles and practices, which spread like wild-fire in some of his Societies; where persons, who spoke in the most glorious manner of Christ, and their interest in His complete salvation, have been found living in the greatest immoralities, or indulging in the most unchristian tempers. Nor need I go far for a proof of this sad assertion. In one of his Societies, not many miles from my parish, a married man, who professed being in *a state of justification and sanctification,* growing wise above what is written, despised his brethren as legalists, and his teachers as persons not clear in the Gospel. He instilled his principles into a serious young woman; and what was the consequence? Why, they talked about 'finished salvation in Christ,' and 'the absurdity of perfection in the flesh,' till a perfect child was conceived and born; and, to save appearances, the woman swore it to a travelling man that cannot be heard of. Thus, to avoid legality, they plunged into hypocrisy, fornication, adultery, perjury, and the depth of ranterism. Is it not hard that a minister should be traduced as guilty of *dreadful heresy* for trying to put a stop to such dreadful practices? And is it not high time that he should cry to all that regard his warnings, '*Take heed to your doctrine*'?"

Fletcher then proceeds to give a deplorable picture of many of the professing Christians of the age, which, it is to be hoped, was too darkly drawn, though it is difficult to prove it was. The following extract shows that many of the Methodists were not better than their neighbours, and that it was of paramount importance that Wesley's preachers should *take heed to their doctrine*:—

"Mr. Wesley has many persons in his Societies, (and would to God there were none in ours!) who profess they were justified or sanctified in a moment; but, instead of trusting in the living God, so *trust in what was done in that moment*, as to give over taking up their cross *daily*, and *watching unto prayer with all perseverance*. The consequences are deplorable: they slide back into the spirit of the world; and their tempers are no more regulated by the meek, gentle, humble love of Jesus. Some inquire with the heathens, *What shall we eat, and what shall we drink* to please ourselves? Others evidently *love the world; lay up treasures on earth;* or ask, *Wherewith shall we be fashionably clothed?* Therefore, *the love of the Father is not in them*. And not a few are *led captive by the devil at his will:* influenced by his unhappy suggestions, they harbour bitterness, malice, and revenge: none is in the right but themselves, and 'wisdom shall die with them.'

"Now, Sir, Mr. Wesley cannot but fear it is not well with persons who are in any of these cases: though everybody should join to extol them as 'dear children of God,' he is persuaded that *Satan has beguiled them, as he did Eve;* and he addresses them, as our Lord did the angel of the church of Sardis,—'I know thy works, that thou *hast a name, that thou livest; and art dead*,' or dying: '*Repent, therefore, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*'"

When it is remembered that Fletcher's manuscript was read and revised by Wesley, before it was printed, the foregoing description of "*many persons*" in Wesley's Societies is possessed of more than ordinary interest. Only ten years had elapsed since the great revival of Christian perfection in those Societies, and yet such was the judgment pronounced by Fletcher, and which Wesley sanctioned!

After explaining and defending all the doctrines contained in Wesley's "Minutes," Fletcher concludes his fourth letter as follows:—

> "Thus, Sir, have I looked out for the *heresy*, the *dreadful heresy* of Mr. Wesley's 'Minutes,' by bringing all the propositions they contain to the touchstone of Scripture and common sense; but, instead of finding it, I have found the very marrow of the Gospel of Christ. I have showed that the 'Minutes' contain nothing but what is truly scriptural; and nothing but what the best Calvinist divines have themselves, directly or indirectly, asserted; except, perhaps, the sixth proposition concerning the merit of works; and, with respect to this, I hope I have demonstrated, upon rational and evangelical principles, that Mr. Wesley, far from *bringing in a damnable heresy*, has done the Gospel justice, and Protestantism service, by candidly giving up an old prejudice, equally contrary to Scripture and good sense,—a piece of bigotry which has long hardened the papists against the doctrine of salvation by the merit of Christ, and has added inconceivable strength to the Antinomian delusion among us.
>
> One difficulty remains, and that is, to account for your attacking Mr. Wesley, though you could not wound him without stabbing yourself. Reserving my reflections upon this amazing step for another letter,
>
> "I remain your astonished servant in the bonds of a peaceful Gospel,
>
> "J. FLETCHER."

As here indicated, the fifth and last letter contained that which most offended Shirley. In his "Narrative," Shirley remarks:—

> "Mr. Wesley assured us he had corrected all the *tart* expressions in them" (that is, in Fletcher's Letters). "Alas! *Qualia verba, quæ facta!* Whether there are *no tart* expressions in the Letters, let every one that hath seen them judge. But, perhaps, this learned gentleman distinguishes between the *tart* and the *bitter*. If all the *tart* expressions are corrected, I am sure there are enough of the *bitter* left.
>
> "As to the Letters themselves, I shall have 'the author's' pardon for noticing two particular charges against me.
>
> "1. I am supposed to want candour; as if I had put a forced construction on the 'Minutes,' in order to bring Mr. Wesley in guilty. Mr. Fletcher has attempted a 'vindication' of them; and, by breaking them into sentences and half-sentences, and refining upon each of these detached particles, he has done more than I could have expected, even from his great abilities, in giving a new turn to the whole. But, after reading his learned and elaborate 'Vindication,' when I cast my eye

over the 'Minutes,' and consider the whole as it stands in context, I must own, I am just where I was: nothing *but the 'Declaration'* could ever convince me that justification by works was not maintained and supported by the 'Minutes.'

"2. The charge of *inconsistency* is supported by quotations from my sermons. To this, I beg leave to observe, that the passages quoted are not altogether in point; neither do they maintain justification by works in such direct and express terms as the 'Minutes' appear to do. I must, however, own that they savour too strongly of mysticism and free-will; and all I can say, on my behalf in this respect, is, that they were written many years ago, at a time when I had more zeal than light; that my present ministry, as well as my present way of thinking, is very different; and that I have frequently expressed my disapprobation of those sermons, nay wished they had been burnt."

Shirley was nettled; and, after the imperious arrogance displayed in his "Circular Letter," he deserved to be. Fletcher's fifth and last letter is caustical; but not more so than the occasion justified. The following is extracted from it:—

"HON. AND REV. SIR,—Having vindicated both some important doctrines of the Gospel, and an eminent servant of Christ from the charge of *dreadful heresy*, I will now take the liberty of a friend to expostulate a little with *you*.

"When Brutus, among other senators, rushed upon Cæsar, the venerable general said, 'Art thou also among them? Even thou, my son?' May not Mr. Wesley address you, Sir, in the same words, and add, 'If a body of men must be raised to attack me, let some zealous follower of Dr. Crisp, some hot-headed vindicator of reprobation and eternal justification blow the trumpet, and put himself at their head; but let it not be *you*, who believe with me that we are moral agents; that God is love; that Jesus tasted death for every man; and that the Holy Spirit shall not always strive with sinners. If you do not regard my reputation, consider at least your own, and expose me not as a heretic for advancing propositions, the substance of which you have avowed before the sun.'

"But had those propositions, at length, appeared to you unsound, yea, and had you never maintained them yourself, should you not, as a Christian and a brother, have wrote to Mr. Wesley, acquainted him with your objections, and desired him to solve them and explain himself, or you should be obliged publicly to expose him?

"Was this condescension more than was due from you, Sir, and our other friends, to a grey-headed minister of Christ, an old general in the armies of Emmanuel, a father who has children capable of instructing even masters in Israel, and one whom God made the first and principal instrument of the late revival of internal religion in our Church?

"Instead of this friendly method, as if you were a Barak, *commanded by the Lord God of Israel*, you call *together the children of Naphthali* *and Zebulun:* you convene, from England and Wales, clergy and laity, Churchmen and Dissenters, to meet you at Bristol, where they are, it seems, to be entertained in good and free quarters. And for what grand expedition? Why, on a day appointed, you are to march up *in a body,* not to attack Sisera and his iron chariots, but an old Caleb, who, without meddling with you, quietly goes on to the conquest of Canaan; not to desire, in a friendly manner, after a fair debate of every proposition that appears dangerous, and, upon previous conviction, that what is exceptionable may be given up; but to do what I think was never done by nominal, much less by *real Protestants.* O let it not be told in Rome, lest the sons of the Inquisition rejoice! This mixed, this formidable body is to *insist upon* Mr. Wesley and the preachers in his connexion, *formally recanting* their 'Minutes,' as *appearing injurious to the very fundamental principles of Christianity,* and being *dreadfully heretical.* And this, astonishing! without the least inquiry made into their meaning and design, without a shadow of authority from our superiors in Church or State, without an appeal *to the law and to the testimony,* without form of process, without judge or jury, without so much as allowing the poor heretics (who are condemned six weeks before they can possibly be heard) to answer for themselves!

"How could you suppose, Sir, that Mr. Wesley and the preachers who assemble with him are such weak men, as tamely to acknowledge themselves heretics upon your *ipse dixit?* Suppose Mr. Wesley took it in his head to convene all the divines that disapprove the extract of Zanchius,[1] to go with him in a body to Mr. Toplady's chapel, and demand a formal recantation of that performance as heretical; yea, to insist upon it, before they had 'measured swords or broken a pike together,' would not the translator of Zanchius laugh at him, and ask whether he thought to frighten him by his protests, or bully him into orthodoxy?

"O, Sir, have we not fightings enough without, to employ all our time and strength? Must we also declare war and promote fightings within? Must we catch at every opportunity to stab one another, because the livery of truth which we wear is not turned up in the same manner? What can be more cruel than this? What can be more cutting to an old minister of Christ, than to be traduced as a dreadful heretic, in printed letters sent to the best men in the land, yea, through all England and Scotland, and signed by a person of your rank and piety? To have things that he knows not, that he never meant, laid to his charge, and dispersed far and near? While he is gone to a neighbouring kingdom,[2] to preach Jesus Christ, to have his friends prejudiced, his foes elevated, and the fruit of his extensive ministry at the point of being blasted? Put yourself in his place, Sir, and you will see that the wound is deep and reaches the very heart.

---

[1] In 1769, Toplady published "The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted. Translated, in great measure, from the Latin of Jerome Zanchius; with some Account of his Life prefixed." 8vo. 134 pp. An impious production, in the garb of piety.

[2] Wesley was in Ireland from March 24 to July 22, 1771. It was during this period that Shirley sent forth his offensive "Circular Letter."

"Our Elijah[1] has lately been translated to heaven. Grey-headed Elisha is yet awhile continued upon earth. And shall we make a hurry and noise, to bring in railing accusations against him with more success? Shall the sons of prophets, shall even *children* in grace and knowledge, openly traduce the venerable seer and his abundant labours? When they see him run upon his Lord's errands, shall they cry, not, '*Go up, thou bald head,*' but, '*Go up, thou heretic*'? O Jesus of Nazareth, Thou rejected of men, Thou Who wast once called a deceiver of the people, suffer it not; lest the raging bear of persecution come suddenly out of the wood upon those sons of discord, and tear them in pieces."

Remembering the confidential and warm friendship that had existed between Fletcher and the Countess of Huntingdon and her nephew, Walter Shirley, it must be admitted that these "expostulations" were pungent; but they were provoked by the arrogance of the offenders. It is true, as already stated, that, on the evening before Wesley's Conference assembled, her ladyship and Shirley wrote letters to Wesley containing half-hearted apologies for their "arbitrary way of proceeding" in the "Circular Letter." "It must be acknowledged," said Shirley, "that, upon the whole, the Circular Letter was too hastily drawn up and improperly expressed; and, therefore, for the *offensive expressions* in it, we desire we may be hereby understood to make every suitable submission to you, Sir, and to the gentlemen of the Conference."[2] The apology was proper; but it was not sufficient. The "Circular Letter," branding Wesley as a dreadful heretic, had been sent to a large number of "principal persons, both clergy and laity," throughout the three kingdoms; whereas the letters of the Countess and her nephew were private ones, addressed only to Wesley and his preachers. Moreover, the apology was accompanied with a threat.

"I cannot but wish," wrote Shirley, "that the recantation of the Circular Letter may prevail as an example for the recantation of the 'Minutes.' If I should be unhappily disappointed in this respect, I shall feel myself bound in conscience to yield my public testimony against such doctrines as these, which appear to me subversive of the *fundamentals* of Christianity."[1]

---

[1] Whitefield, who died September 30, 1770.
[2] Shirley's "Narrative."

And, once more, the apology, such as it was, was sent too late, for Fletcher had already written his "Vindication" of Wesley's "Minutes;" the manuscript had been sent to Wesley, and Wesley had revised it, and committed it to the press.

The war was begun, and we must follow it to its termination, *so far as Fletcher is concerned;* for it is impossible, in a work like this, to notice *all* the pamphlets that were published. Those who wish for further information may turn to the "Life and Times of Wesley."

---

[1] Shirley's "Narrative."

CHAPTER IX.

SECOND CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM

1771.

WESLEY'S "Minutes" and Shirley's "Circular Letter" created a commotion. The Rev. Walter Sellon had recently published his "Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Absolute Predestination; as it is stated and asserted by the Translator of Jerome Zanchius" [Toplady] "in his Letter to the Rev. Dr. Nowell. Together with some Animadversions on his Translation of Zanchius, his Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, and his Sermon on 1 Tim. i. 10." This not over-courteous publication was reviewed in the August number of the *Gospel Magazine* for 1771; and, no doubt, the review had been read by the gentlemen who proposed to invade Wesley's Conference. It began as follows:—

> "A composition of low scurrility and illiberal abuse, for which this author and his coadjutors are remarkable. Not one Calvinist who comes in his way escapes. He is so much given up to slander and defamation, that he can no more refrain from defaming even the dead than from slandering the living."

Its last paragraph was the following; and these two citations will enable the reader to form an opinion of the whole:—

> "When we meet with erroneous systems set up in opposition to the Word of God, we speak our mind freely of them, and aim to show the dangerous tendency of them. But no sooner do we touch the cobweb system of self-righteous Pharisees, but they cry out, with their brethren of old to our Lord, 'Thou reproachest us also.' We cannot aim to dissect and expose their opinions, but they cry out of slandering their persons, and 'Oh, you have no love to Mr. John!' God bless Mr.

John! But who is Mr. John? Is he the standard of truth, the pinnacle of orthodoxy, the touchstone by which truth is to be tried and known? What is Mr. John? What is Mr. Walter? Men, frail men, and miserable sinners like ourselves. All that we say of them is, As men, we love them; as miserable sinners, we wish their salvation; as fellow-creatures, we would not hurt a hair of their heads; whatever is in our power to do them good, we would cheerfully minister unto them."

In the September number of the same periodical, there was a letter, signed "Simplex," and dated "August 3, 1771, From the Neighbourhood of the Foundery," as follows:—

"SIR,—I have just read your last number, and am amazed at the Declaration in it, as made by Mr. Wesley and his friends, at the late Conference at Bristol. I am amazed at the wisdom of that great man that he should devise a Declaration[1] couched in terms so ambiguous as to satisfy his opponents, whilst, in reality, it denies not one tittle clearly asserted in the 'Minutes;' and I am amazed at gentlemen, who might have been acquainted with the unfathomable policy of that dubious divine, not being more upon their guard than to have been put off by such an unmeaning confession.

"Since the Conference, and, of course, since the making of this Declaration, Mr. Fletcher has published a very warm, and not ill-written 'Vindication of the Minutes,' which, from his intimacy with Mr. Wesley, evidently shows that the gentleman in question never meant to recant what he had declared in the 'Minutes' when he signed the Declaration.[2]

"What can we think of this? You ask, What can we say to this? Why, gentlemen, you may say that the fox has had sagacity enough to elude his hunters. Or, in other words, that Mr. Wesley is, what I always took him to be, a very wise man.

"Does this tend to clear up the affair? Yes. Taken in its connection with Fletcher's 'Vindication of the Minutes,' it very plainly clears it up to every man; and shows that however these gentlemen may abhor the doctrine of justification by the *merit* of works, as most perilous and abominable, they are determined to abide by the doctrine of justification by works as a condition, which is all that is clearly expressed in the 'Minutes.' If Cranmer and his brethren had drunk half as deep into the spirit of Ignatius," [Loyala!] "they had never been brought to the stake for their doctrine; but might even have outwitted the eagle-eyed Bishops of London and Winchester."

---

[1] This is a calumny. The Declaration was not drawn up by Wesley, but by Shirley. "Wesley," says Shirley, "made some, *not very material*, alterations in it."

[2] Another misrepresentation; for Fletcher's manuscript was committed to the press before the Declaration was signed.

Another communication by "Simplex" must be noticed. Like his former letter, it was printed in the *Gospel Magazine.* It was dated "From the Neighbourhood of the Foundery, October 9, 1771," and was addressed "To the Rev. Mr. Wesley, Mr. Sellon, Mr. Fletcher, and Mr. Olivers." The following are extracts from it:—

> "Mr. Wesley is now an old man, and, according to the course of nature, must in a little time have done with a lying world. Let him, like an honest man, a Christian, that has heaven in his eye, and a sense of the Divine presence upon his heart, tell us plainly whether he really thinks that his continuance in the love of God, and the exercise of faith, is owing to his own good management, or to the sovereignty and freeness of the love of God and agency of the Holy Ghost?"

The *temper* of this production is painfully displayed in its concluding paragraph:—

> "Should any reply be made to this letter, and might I be indulged with liberty to choose my correspondent, I would most earnestly deprecate having anything to do with the Reverend Mr. Walter Sellon, as I am no adept in scolding, and am sorry to see the name of a Christian minister prefaced to such foul and futile productions as those of Mr. Sellon's pen. Mr. Fletcher's pen is indeed more cleanly, but every whit as unfair; and him I object to because he is apt to exclaim against his opponents as enemies to Christian peace, even when he himself does what he can to stab their reputation to the heart. He is very apt grievously to complain of ill-usage from others, when, at the same time, like a madman, he himself keeps flinging abroad firebrands, arrows, and death amongst those who differ from him. Mr. Olivers should be my man, if in future he will guard against shocking common decency, as he has done in his letter to Mr. Toplady, where he is pleased to call Mr. Hervey's admirable letters to Mr. Wesley *scurrilous:* which *indecency*, although borrowed indeed from *Mr. Walter Sellon*, must needs have an influence fatal to Master Thomas Olivers' credit as a writer. As to the Rev. Mr. Wesley himself, I do not expect that he can spare so much time as to give a satisfactory answer to my querulous epistle, as it will require his being more explicit than he has hitherto accustomed himself to be."

Enough has been said to show the bitterness of feeling which had already sprung up against Fletcher (to say nothing of Wesley, Sellon, and Olivers), and that it was not surprising he was induced to defend himself against such infamous attacks as those of "Simplex" and his Calvinian friends.

Meanwhile, Shirley was passing through the press his

"Narrative of the Principal Circumstances relating to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's late Conference, held in Bristol August the 6th, 1771" (8 vo., 24 pp.) Fletcher refers to this in the following extract from an unpublished letter addressed to Joseph Benson, and kindly lent by Mr. G. J. Stevenson:—

"MADELEY, *August* 24, 1771.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—How much water may rush out of a little opening! What are our dear lady's jealousies come to? Ah, poor College! They are without a master, but not without a mistress. Their conduct and charges of heresy stirred me up to write in defence of the 'Minutes.' The pamphlet is gone abroad *unseasonably* in its present dress. The *toga* would now suit it, but it wears the *chlamys*. By this means, the voice of the arguments will be lost in the cry of treachery.

"I received this morning a most kind letter from Mr. Shirley, whom I now pity much. He will pass by me; but I fear Mr. Olivers will have some cutting lashes. Mr. Shirley is gone to Wales, probably to consult what to do in the present case. What a world! Methinks I dream when I reflect that I have written on controversy; the last subject I thought I should have meddled with. I expect to be smartly taken in hand and soundly drubbed for it. Lord, prepare me for it, and for everything that may make me cease from man, and above all from your unworthy friend,

"J. FLETCHER.

"P.S. My kindest love to Mr. Mather.[1] I hope you are happy in each other's company. May you be both blessed, as being one heart, and one soul, and colleagues in Jesus!"

Instead of inflicting on Thomas Olivers what Fletcher calls "some cutting lashes," Shirley treated the sturdy Welshman with forbearance; and if he used severity at all, not Wesley's itinerant, but the Vicar of Madeley was his victim.

Fletcher immediately prepared a reply to Shirley's "Narrative;" and, before the year was ended, published it, with the title, "A Second Check to Antinomianism; occasioned by a Late Narrative, in Three Letters to the Hon. and Rev. Author. By the Vindicator of the Reverend Mr. Wesley's Minutes." 12mo, 120 pp. This "Second Check," like the former one, was revised by Wesley,[2] and, therefore, was issued with his approval.

---

[1] Mr. Mather and Mr. Benson were now stationed in Wesley's London Circuit.

[2] See "The Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism," p. 11, First Edition.

Fletcher's first letter to Shirley begins as follows:—

"In my last private communication, I observed, Rev. Sir, that, if your 'Narrative' was kind, I would buy a number of copies, and give them gratis to the purchasers of my book, that they might see all you can possibly produce in your own defence, and do you all the justice your proper behaviour at the Conference deserves. But, as it appears to me there are some important mistakes in that performance, I neither dare recommend it *absolutely* to my friends, nor wish it, in the religious world, the *full* success you desire.

"I do not complain of its severity; on the contrary, considering the sharpness of my fifth letter, I gratefully acknowledge it is *kinder* than I had reason to expect. But permit me to tell you, Sir, I look for *justice* to the scriptural arguments I advance in defence of truth, before I look for *kindness* to my insignificant person, and could be much sooner satisfied with the *former*, than with the *latter* alone. As I do not admire the fashionable method of advancing general charges without supporting them by particular proofs, I shall take the liberty of pointing out some mistakes in your 'Narrative,' and, by that means, endeavour to do justice to Mr. Wesley's 'Declaration,' your own 'Sermons,' my 'Vindication,' and, above all, to the cause of practical religion."

Fletcher then proceeds to quote numerous texts of Scripture in support of the doctrine of a second justification by works, and argues that it "will rouse Antinomians out of their carnal security, stir up believers to follow hard after holiness, and reconcile fatal differences among Christians, and seeming contradictions in the Scripture."

In sundry passages he treats the Antinomians with deserved severity; but, in a long foot-note, observes:—

"I beg I may not be understood to level the following paragraphs, or any part of these letters, at my pious *Calvinist* brethren. God knows how deeply I reverence many, who are immovably fixed in, what some call, *the doctrines of grace;* how gladly (as conscious of their genuine conversion and eminent usefulness) I would lie in the dust at their feet to honour our Lord in His dear members; and how often I have thought it a peculiar infelicity to dissent from such excellent men, with whom I wanted both to live and die, and with whom I hope soon to reign for ever.

"As these *real* children of God lament the bad use Antinomians make of their principles, I hope they will not be offended if I bear my testimony against a growing evil, which they have frequently opposed themselves. While the *Calvinists* guard the *foundation* against *Pharisees*, they will, I hope, allow the *Remonstrants* to guard the *superstructure* against *Antinomians*. If in doing these good offices to the Church, we find ourselves obliged to bear a little hard upon the peculiar sentiments of our opposite friends, let us do it in such a manner as not to break the bonds of peace and brotherly kindness; so shall our honest reproof become matter of useful exercise to that *love* which *thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, rejoiceth* even *in the* galling *truth*, and is neither *quenched by many waters*, nor damped by any opposition."

In his second letter, Fletcher protests against Shirley recanting the doctrines contained in his published sermons, and concludes as follows:—

"I assure you, Sir, I do not love the warlike dress of the Vindicator, any more than David did the heavy armour of Saul. With gladness, therefore, I cast it aside to throw myself at your feet, and protest to you, that, though I thought it my *duty* to write to you with the utmost *plainness*, *frankness*, and *honesty*, the design of doing it with *bitterness* never entered my heart. However, for every '*bitter expression*' that may have dropped from my sharp, vindicating pen, I ask you pardon; but it must be *in general*, for neither friends nor foes have yet *particularly* pointed out to me *one* such expression.

"You condescend, Rev. Sir, to call me your 'learned friend.' *Learning* is an accomplishment I never pretended to; but your *friendship* is an honour I shall always highly esteem, and do at this time value above my own brother's love. Appearances are a little against me: I feel I am a thorn in your flesh; but I am persuaded it is a *necessary* one, and this persuasion reconciles me to the thankless and disagreeable part I act. I can assure you, my dear Sir, I love and honour you, as truly as I dislike the rashness of your well-meant zeal. The motto I thought myself obliged to follow was, '*E bello pax;*' but that which I delight in is, '*In bello pax.*' May we make them harmonize till we learn war and polemic divinity no more!

"If in the meantime we offend our weak brethren, let us do something to lessen the offence till it is removed. Let us show them we make war without so much as shyness. Should you ever come to the next county, as you did last summer, honour me with a line, and I shall gladly wait upon you, and show you (if you permit me) the way to my pulpit, where I shall think myself highly favoured to see you 'secure the foundation,' and hear you enforce the doctrine of *justification by faith*, which you fear we attack. And should I ever be within thirty miles of the city where you reside, I shall go to submit myself to you, and beg leave to assist you in reading prayers for you, or giving the cup with you. Thus shall we convince the world how controversy may be conscientiously carried on without interruption of brotherly love; and I shall have the peculiar pleasure of testifying to you in person how sincerely I am,

"Honoured and dear Sir,

"Your submissive and obedient servant, in the bond of a *practical* Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."

The third letter, to a large extent, is historical, and shows, with terrific faithfulness, that not a few of the so-called evangelical ministers and churches of a hundred years ago were far from what they should have been, and that Wesley's "Minutes" and Fletcher's "Checks" were greatly needed. Fletcher writes:—

"For some years, I have suspected there is more imaginary than *unfeigned faith* in most of those who pass for believers. With a mixture of indignation and grief, have I seen them carelessly follow the stream of corrupt nature, against which they should have manfully wrestled. When they should have exclaimed against their *Antinomianism*, I have heard them cry out against the *legality* of their wicked hearts; which, they said, still suggested they were to *do something* in order to salvation. Glad was I, therefore, when I had attentively considered Mr. Wesley's 'Minutes,' to find they were levelled at the very errors, which gave rise to an evil I had long lamented in secret, but had wanted courage to resist and attack."

"Do not imagine, Rev. Sir, I cry up God's law, to drown the late cries of *heresy* and *apostacy*. I appeal to matter of fact and to your own observations. Consider the religious world, and say if 'Antinomianism' is not, in general, a motto better adapted to the state of professing congregations, societies, families, and individuals, than '*Holiness unto the Lord.*'

"Begin with *congregations*, and cast your eyes upon the *hearers*. In general, they have curious '*itching ears*,' and '*will not endure sound doctrine*.' They say they 'will have nothing but Christ;' and who could blame them if they would have Christ in all His offices? Christ, with all His parables and sermons, cautions and precepts, reproofs and expostulations, exhortations and threatenings? Who would find fault with them, if they would have Christ with His poverty and self-denial, His reproach and cross, His spirit and graces, His prophets and apostles, His plain apparel and mean followers? But, alas! it is not so. They will have *what* they please of Christ, and that too *as* they please. They admire Him in one chapter, and know not what to make of Him in another. If He asserts His authority as a Lawgiver, they are ready to treat Him with as little ceremony as they do Moses. If He says, '*Keep my commandments, I am a King;*' like the Jews of old, they rise against the awful declaration; or they *crown Him* as a *surety*, the better to '*set Him at nought*' as a *monarch*. If He adds to His ministers, 'Go, and teach all nations *to observe all things* whatsoever I have *commanded* you;' they complain, 'This is *the law;* give us *the gospel*, we can relish nothing but the gospel.'"

"Hence it is that some preachers must choose comfortable subjects to please their hearers; just as those, who make an entertainment for nice persons, are obliged to study what will suit their difficult taste. A multitude of important Scriptures can be produced, on which no minister, who is unwilling to lose his reputation as an evangelical preacher, must dare to speak in some pulpits, unless it is to explain away or enervate their meaning."

"Whence springs this almost general Antinomianism of our congregations? Shall I conceal the sore because it festers in my own breast? Shall I be partial? No! In the name of Him who is no respecter of persons, I will confess my sin, and that of many of my brethren. Though I am the least and the most unworthy of them all, I will follow the dictates of my conscience, and use the authority of a minister of Christ.

"Is not the Antinomianism of hearers fomented by that of preachers? Does it not become us to take the greatest part of the blame upon ourselves, according to the old adage, 'Like priest, like people'? Is it surprising that some of us should have an Antinomian audience? Do we not make or keep it so? When did we preach such a practical sermon as that of our Lord on the mount, or write such close letters as the epistles of St. John? Alas! I doubt it is but seldom. Not living so near to God ourselves as we should, we are afraid to come near the consciences of our people. Some prefer popularity to plain-dealing. We love to see a crowd of worldly-minded hearers, rather than a '*little flock*,' '*a peculiar people, zealous of good works*.' Luther's advice to Melancthon, 'So preach that those who do not fall out of love with their sins, may fall out with thee,' is more and more unfashionable. Under pretence of drawing our hearers by love, some of us softly rock the cradle of carnal security in which they sleep. The old Puritans strongly insisted upon *personal holiness*, and the first Methodists upon the *new birth;* but these doctrines seem to grow out of date. The Gospel is cast into another mould. People, it seems, may now be '*in Christ*' without being '*new creatures*,' or new creatures without casting '*old things*' away. They may be God's children without God's image; and be '*born of the Spirit*' without '*the fruits of the Spirit*.' If our unregenerate hearers get orthodox ideas about the way of salvation in their heads, evangelical phrases concerning Jesus' love in their mouths, and a warm zeal for our party and favourite forms in their hearts, without any more ado, we help them to rank themselves among the children of God. But, alas! this self-adoption into the family of Christ will no more pass in heaven, than self-imputation of Christ's righteousness."

"How few of our celebrated pulpits are there where more has not been said, *at times*, for sin than against it! With what an air of positiveness and assurance has that Barabbas, that murderer of Christ and souls, been pleaded for! 'It will humble us, make us watchful, stir up our diligence, quicken our graces, endear Christ.' That is, in plain English, pride will beget humility, sloth will spur us on to diligence, rust will brighten our armour, and unbelief, the very soul of every sinful temper, is to do the work of faith! Jesus, who cleansed the lepers with a word or a touch, cannot, with all the force of His

Spirit, and virtue of His blood, expel the leprosy of sin; it is too inveterate. Death, that foul monster, the offspring of sin, shall have the important honour of killing his father. This is confidently asserted by those who cry, 'Nothing but Christ!' They allow Him to lop off the branches; but Death, the great Saviour Death, is to destroy the root of sin. In the meantime, *the temple of God* shall *have agreement with idols*, and *Christ concord with Belial*: *the Lamb of God shall lie down with the roaring Lion in our heart.*"

"To speak the melancholy truth, how few individuals are free from practical Antinomianism! Setting aside their attendance on the ministry of the Word, where is the material difference between several of our genteel believers and other people? Do not we see the sumptuous furniture in their apartments, and fashionable elegance in their dress? What sums of money do they frequently lay out in costly superfluities to adorn their persons, houses, and gardens! In our fashionable churches and chapels, you may find people professing to believe the Bible, who so conform to this present world as to wear gold, pearls, and precious stones, when no distinction of office or state obliges them to it, in direct opposition to the words of two Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul. Multitudes of professors, far from being convinced of their sin in this respect, ridicule Mr. Wesley for bearing his testimony against it. The opposition he dares to make to that growing branch of vanity affords matter of pious mirth to a thousand Antinomians. Isaiah could openly reprove the *haughty daughters of Zion*, who *walked with stretched forth necks, wanton eyes, and tinkling feet:* he could expose *the bravery of their fashionable ornaments, their round tires like the moon, their chains, bracelets, head-bands, rings and ear-rings;* but some of our humble Christian ladies will not bear a reproof from Mr. Wesley on the head of dress. They even laugh at him as a *pitiful legalist*, and yet, oh, the inconsistency of the Antinomian spirit! they call Isaiah the *evangelical prophet!*

"Finery is often attended with an expensive table, at least with such delicacies as our purse can reach. St. Paul *kept his body under*, and was *in fastings often;* and our Lord gives us directions about the proper manner of *fasting*. But the apostle did not *know* the easy way to heaven taught by Dr. Crisp; and our Lord did not *approve* of it, or He would have saved Himself the trouble of His directions. In general, we look upon fasting much as we do upon penitential flagellation. Both equally raise our pity; we leave them both to popish devotees. Some of our good old Church people will yet fast on Good Friday: but our fashionable believers begin to cast away that last scrap of self-denial. Their faith, which should produce, animate, and regulate works of mortification, goes a shorter way to work; it explodes them all."

Fletcher continues to write in the same strain, through many succeeding pages; but one more extract must suffice.

"If *these shall go into eternal punishment;* if such will be the end of all the impenitent Nicolaitans; if our churches and chapels swarm with them; if they crowd our communion tables; if they are found in most of our houses, and too many of our pulpits; if the seeds of their fatal disorder are in all our breasts; if they produce Antinomianism around us in all its forms; if we see bold Antinomians in *principle*, bare-faced Antinomians in *practice*, and sly *pharisaical Antinomians*,[1] who speak well of the law, to break it with greater advantage,—should not every one *examine himself whether he is in the faith*, and whether he has a *holy Christ* in his heart, as well as a *sweet Jesus* upon his tongue; lest he should one day swell the tribe of Antinomian reprobates? Does it not become every minister of Christ to drop his prejudices, and consider whether he ought not to imitate the old watchman, who, fifteen months ago, gave a *legal alarm* to all the watchmen that are in connexion with him? And should we not do the Church excellent service, if, agreeing to lift up our voices against the common enemy, we gave God no rest in prayer, and our hearers in preaching, till we all *did our first works*, and *our latter end*, like Job's, *exceeded our beginning?*

"Near forty years ago, some of the ministers of Christ, in our Church, were called out of the extreme of self-righteousness. Flying from it, we have run into the opposite, with equal violence. Now that we have learned wisdom by what we have suffered in going beyond the limits of truth both ways, let us return to a just scriptural medium. Let us equally maintain the two evangelical axioms on which the Gospel is founded: 1. 'All our salvation is of God, by free grace, through the alone merits of Christ.' And, 2. 'All our damnation is of ourselves, through our avoidable unfaithfulness.'"

Fletcher's pictures are dark: I incline to *think* a little too dark, though I cannot *prove* they are. At all events, were existing facts such as he states them to have been, it was high time to sound an alarm in Zion.

In a postscript to his "Three Letters," Fletcher refers to a pamphlet published by Richard Hill, Esq., respecting a conversation which he and others had held with a monk in Paris. Having quoted Mr. Hill's remark, that, according to the monk, "Popery is about the mid-way between Protestantism and Mr. J. Wesley," Fletcher proceeds to say:—

---

[1] It may be well to say, once for all, that all these quotations, with their *differences of type*, are taken from the *first editions* of Fletcher's publications. The differences are not preserved in recent editions.

[2] Its title was "A Conversation between Richard Hill, Esq., the Rev. Mr. Madan, and Father Walsh, Superior of a Convent of Benedictine Monks at Paris, held at the same Convent, July 13, 1771, in the presence of Thomas Powis, Esq., and others, relative to some Doctrinal Minutes advanced by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley and others, at a Conference held in London, August 7, 1770. To which are added some Remarks by the Editor." Fletcher's name is not mentioned in the pamphlet;

> "We desire to be confronted with all the pious Protestant divines. But, who would believe it? the suffrage of a papist is brought against us! Astonishing! that our opposers should think it worth their while to raise one recruit against us in the immense city of Paris, where fifty thousand might be raised against the Bible itself!
>
> "So long as Christ, the prophets, and apostles are for us, together with the multitude of the Puritan divines of the last century, we shall smile at an army of Popish friars. The knotted whips, that hang by their side, will no more frighten us from our Bibles, than the *ipse dixit* of a Benedictine monk will make us explode, as heretical, propositions which are demonstrated to be scriptural.
>
> "I hope the gentlemen concerned in the 'Conversation,' lately published, will excuse the liberty of this postscript. I reverence their piety, rejoice in their labours, and honour their warm zeal for the Protestant cause; but that very zeal, if not accompanied with a close attention to every part of the Gospel truth, may betray them into mistakes, which may spread as far as their respectable names. I think it therefore my duty to publish these strictures, lest any of my readers should pay more regard to the good-natured friar, who has been pressed into the service of Dr. Crisp, than to St. John, St. Paul, St. James, and Jesus Christ, on whose plain declarations I have shown that the 'Minutes'" (of Mr. Wesley) "are founded."

So ends all that need be said here concerning Fletcher's "Second Check to Antinomianism." To appreciate its style, its temper, and its arguments, the reader must peruse it for himself; and, by doing so, his mind will be enriched, and his soul profited.

An extract from one of Fletcher's letters may fitly close this section of his biography. The letter was addressed to the Rev. Joseph Benson, and was dated "December 5, 1771."

> "There is undoubtedly such a thing as the *full assurance of faith.* Be not discouraged on account of thousands, who stop short of it. It is our own fault if we do not attain it. God would give us ample satisfaction if we did but deeply feel our wants. Both you and I want a

---

but because he chose to refer to it in his "Second Check to Antinomianism," it is here introduced to the reader's notice. Hereafter, in order to avoid, as far as possible, a repetition of the history of the Calvinian controversy, as published in the "Life and Times of Wesley," no publications on the subject will be discussed, except those in which Fletcher was attacked, or which he answered.—L. T.

deeper awakening, which will produce a death to outward things and speculative knowledge. Let us shut our eyes to the gilded clouds without us: let us draw inward, and search after God, if haply we may find Him. Let us hold fast our confidence, though we are often constrained against hope, to believe in hope. But let us not rest in our confidence, as thousands do; let it help us to struggle and wait, till He come. Let us habituate ourselves to live inwardly. This will solemnize us, and prevent our trifling with the things of God. We may be thankful for what we have without resting in it. We may strive, and yet not trust in our striving; but expect all from Divine grace."[1]

In such a frame of mind and heart Fletcher carried on his polemic warfare.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

CHAPTER X.

"*THIRD CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM.*"

1772.

WHEN Fletcher finished his "Second Check to Antinomianism," in "Three Letters" to Walter Shirley, he began a "Vindication of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection." This, however, for a time, was laid aside; but was afterwards completed, and embodied in his "Last Check to Antinomianism." The reason for this postponement was a somewhat sudden determination to write upon the Unitarian Controversy, which was now as prominent as the Calvinian one. A brief biographical episode will explain the matter more fully.

Edward Elwall was born at Sedgley, in Staffordshire. He settled in business at Wolverhampton, where he acquired the reputation of great integrity in his dealings. He had not enjoyed the advantages of a learned education, but he possessed a serious and inquisitive turn of mind, and had good natural abilities. One of his first publications was intended to prove that the fourth commandment, appointing the *seventh* day of the week to be observed as the Sabbath, was binding on all generations. As long as he continued in business, he constantly shut up his shop on that day, and as regularly opened it on the succeeding one. For this he was called a Jew. About the year 1714, he became distinguished as an Unitarian, and published, "A true Testimony for God and His sacred Law, being a Defence of the first Commandment of God, against all Trinitarians under Heaven." This drew on him the resentment of the neighbouring clergy, who procured an indictment against him for heresy and blasphemy, on which he was tried at Stafford Assizes. He pleaded his own cause, and was acquitted. After this, he removed to London, and became a member of the Seventh-day Baptist Church at Mill-yard, Goodman's Fields. Towards the end of life, he attended the meetings of the Quakers, and was sometimes permitted to speak at them. He died in London, at an advanced age, about the year 1745.

Elwall's work "against all Trinitarians under Heaven" had recently been re-published, and Fletcher was requested to answer it. Hence the following, hitherto unpublished, letter, addressed to "the Rev. Walter Selion, at Ledsham, near Ferry-Bridge, Yorkshire."

"MADELEY, *January* 7, 1772.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for yours. I hope Glazebrook[1] will be more moderate, on account of some rubs which his new Calvinistic zeal has procured him.

"My reason for troubling you soon with an answer is to make a request. I have laid by my Third ——[2], which is a vindication of the doctrine of Christian perfection. A pamphlet (the third edition) has lately been published at Birmingham, and meets with great success. The author is E. Elwall, a Socinian Quaker, who was tried for blasphemy at Stafford, and came off with flying colours, after fully denying the Godhead of Christ, and His atonement.

"Some serious people have desired me to answer the book. As I suppose your *Dr. Preese*[3]" (sic) "is one of his stamp, I want to see by your candle as well as my own. Could you send me, by the post, what you have published against him? By cutting the margin close, you might bring it to a tolerable size for a packet; and I should not grudge paying the postage. If you cannot do this, send me, at least, your best answer to the objection taken from John xvii. 3, and to the words '*only God*,' which seem to exclude Jesus Christ.

"We must fight the Antinomians while the Calvinists put weapons into their hands against the truth. Mr. Hill has taken Mr. Wesley in hand very roughly. I have been with him. His answer to my 'Vindication' is expected every day, and is out, I suppose, in London. God give us wisdom! Set your razor against Mason, for what we mean as keenness (which is allowable) is directly construed as bitterness.

---

[1] The poor collier whom Fletcher so greatly befriended at Madeley, and who was one of the first students at Trevecca, in 1768.

[2] The words are illegible, but, no doubt, his "Third Check to Antinomianism" is meant.

[3] Probably meant for the celebrated Dr. Price, of whom more will have to be said anon.

"When you send the packet, put upon the direction, '*Not by London, but by + Post Bag, Manchester and Salop*,' or else they will make me pay double.

"I preach much, and see little fruit. The Holy Ghost is not given among us. These are hard times. God help us to more gospel and life, but not my lady's gospel!

"I am yours in a hurry,
"J. FLETCHER."

Not to mention other matters referred to in this letter, there can be no doubt that Fletcher now began to write his Anti-Socinian Treatises; but, as will be seen hereafter, he never finished them. Other things, even more pressing, claimed his attention, and he was obliged to postpone his attack on the citadel of *religious infidelity*.

"I long to be out of controversy," said Fletcher to Joseph Benson, in a letter dated February 1772,[1] and yet he continued it. He could not help himself. To say nothing of the duty he owed to Christ and Gospel truth, it was impossible, at present, to retire from the field of conflict without exposing himself to the taunt of recreant timidity. Besides, though his opponents had been vanquished, they would, in that case, have appeared victorious. No doubt, also, he was encouraged to proceed by his bespattered but beloved friend Wesley. In a letter to Lady Maxwell, Wesley wrote:—

"LONDON, *February* 8, 1772.

"MY DEAR LADY,—I commend you for meddling with points of controversy as little as possible. It is abundantly easier to lose our love in that rough field, than to find truth. This consideration has made me exceedingly thankful to God for giving me a respite from polemical labours. I am glad He has given to others both the power and the will to answer them that trouble me; so that I may not always be forced to hold my weapons in one hand, while I am building with the other. I rejoice, likewise, not only in the abilities, but in the temper, of Mr. Fletcher. He writes as he lives. I cannot say that I know such another clergyman in England or Ireland. He is all fire, but it is the fire of love. His writings, like his constant conversation, breathe nothing else, to those who read him with an impartial eye. And, although Mr. Shirley scruples not to charge him with using subtilty and metaphysical distinctions, yet he abundantly clears himself of this charge, in the 'Second Check to Antinomianism.' Such the last letters are styled, and with great propriety; for such they have really been. They have given a considerable check to those who were everywhere making void the law through faith; setting 'the righteousness of Christ' in opposition to the law of Christ, and teaching that without holiness any man may see the Lord."[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

All, however, were not of Wesley's opinion. In Ireland, Walter Shirley was a great favourite among the Methodists, for there he had preached with much success. Fletcher's first and second "Checks" were addressed to Shirley; and the Irish Methodists, who, as yet, had neither heard nor seen their author, were divided in their sentiments respecting them. The Dublin Society wrote two letters to him, in answer to which he sent them the following:—

"To the Methodist Society at Dublin.

"MADELEY, *March*, 1772.

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—Mercy and love be multiplied unto you, from Him who was and is to come, the Almighty!

"I should have acknowledged before now the favour of the two letters with which you honoured me, if I had not conveyed my thanks to you immediately by means of brother Morgan.[2] But thanks at second-hand do not satisfy my gratitude; permit me, therefore, to present them, if not in person, at least by some grateful lines personally written.

"I am much obliged to those of you who approve my little attempt to vindicate practical religion and the character of an eminent servant of Christ, who ministered unto you in holy things, and whom some of our mistaken friends in England exposed as the author of dreadful heresy. The thanks which some of you unexpectedly bestowed upon me on that occasion, I have laid at the feet of Jesus, to whom all praise belongs, who is the author of every good gift, and from whom comes all the help done upon the earth.

"When I took up my pen, I aimed at discharging my duty towards God and His misapprehended truth; towards my honoured father in Christ, Mr. Wesley, and his misunderstood 'Minutes'; and though all the world should have blamed me, they would never have robbed me of the satisfaction of having at least attempted to clear my conscience.

"The manner in which part of you have refused me their thanks, is too civil and brotherly not to deserve mine. I wish many of our English brethren had been as moderate as you in their disapprobation of my letters to the Rev. Mr. Shirley. You will see in a 'Second Check to Antinomianism' some things that may reconcile you to the first; and I have just sent to the press a 'Third Check,' to what appears to me the favourite delusion of the Church; which I trust will cast more light on the delicate subject about which we divide.

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 326.

[2] One of Wesley's itinerant preachers, well-read and popular, but now enervated, and settled in Dublin.

"If we cannot see things in the same light, I hope we never shall, I beg we never may, disagree in love.

"I am glad you agreed to disagree about the giving or refusing me your undeserved thanks. Let every little rub of opposition heighten our love; every little clashing of sentiment make the heavenly spark show itself, and kindle our souls into that charity which hopeth all things, endureth all things, thinketh no evil, and is not provoked.

"If I have been obliged to bear a little hardly upon my dear honoured brother, Mr. Shirley, I beg that nothing I have written to him on account of his precipitancy, rashness, or hurry, may prevent you from looking upon him with the love and respect due to a minister of Christ. Recommending him and myself to your prayers, and taking the liberty to recommend to you mutual forbearance, a daily increase of brotherly love, and a continual growth in the genuine liberty of the Gospel, I remain, my dear brethren, your obliged, affectionate, and obedient brother and servant,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

It has been already stated that at the commencement of the year 1772, Fletcher was writing his "Vindication of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection;" and that this was laid aside for the purpose of writing against Socinianism. Very soon, however, he had to devote his attention to another subject. In the foregoing letter, dated "March, 1772," he tells the Methodist Society at Dublin that he had sent his "Third Check to Antinomianism" to the press; and this is confirmed by the following extract from a letter by Wesley to his brother Charles:—

"BIRMINGHAM, *March* 17, 1772.

"I am to-day to meet Mr. Fletcher at Billbrook. Part of the 'Third Check' is printing; the rest I have ready. In this he draws the sword and throws away the scabbard. Yet, I doubt not, they will forgive him all, if he will but promise to write no more."[2]

Fletcher's parochial duties were heavy, and yet he seems to have written his "Third Check to Antinomianism" in about a month. It must have been a strain to accomplish this. The work is no flimsy production, but is full of Scriptural arguments, which could not be framed, arranged, and adequately expressed without a vast amount of labour; and the book itself was of no mean size, consisting, as it did, of one hundred and fourteen small typed and closely printed pages. The following was its title: "A Third Check to Antinomianism; in a Letter to the Author of 'Pietas Oxoniensis:' By the Vindicator of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Minutes. 'Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and *Scriptural* doctrine; for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine,' 2 Tim. iv. 2, 3. '*Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;* but *let brotherly love continue*,' Tit. i. 13, Heb. xiii. 1. Bristol: Printed by W. Pine in Wine Street, 1772."

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters written by the Rev. J. Fletcher." Bath, 1791, p. 22.

[2] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 128.

Why was it written and published? Fletcher had replied to the "Circular Letter" and the "Narrative" of Shirley, and in doing so had vindicated Wesley's "Minutes." Shirley was now silent, but other antagonists started up. A small 8 vo. pamphlet was published, with the title "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, of Madeley, on the Differences subsisting between him and the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Shirley." The author subscribed himself "An enemy to no man, but a friend to religion;" and his letter was dated "Bath, February 3, 1772." This religious gentleman alleged that, under the existing circumstances, the publication of Fletcher's answer to Shirley's "Circular Letter" "was highly censurable, yea, criminal." He accused Fletcher of "wantonly scattering firebrands, arrows, and death;" his defence of Wesley's "Minutes" was "flimsy;" and he was actuated by "personal envy or enmity more than by a love to Christ and a godly zeal to promote truth." Fletcher, properly enough, declined to notice the virulent and frothy pamphlet of this Bath religionist; but another publication, issued about the same time, demanded his attention. Its author was his friend and neighbour, Richard Hill, Esq., and its title as follows: "Five Letters to the Reverend Mr. F——r, relative to his Vindication of the Minutes of the Reverend Mr. John Wesley. Intended chiefly for the comfort of mourning backsliders, and such as may have been distressed and perplexed by reading Mr. Wesley's Minutes, or the Vindication of them. By a Friend. London: 1772." 8 vo., 40 pp.[1]

Mr. Hill's first letter is dated "December 2, 1771."[2] His pamphlet is remarkable for two things—*only two*:—First, the highest Christian urbanity towards Fletcher; and secondy, the writer's curious theology. A few extracts from Mr. Hill's letters will suffice to show that Fletcher's task of answering his courteous opponent was not a difficult undertaking.

> "God alone knows the sorrow of heart wherewith I address you; and how much the fear of casting stumbling-blocks before some who are really sincere, and the apprehensions of giving malicious joy to others who desire no greater satisfaction than to see the children of the Prince of Peace divided among themselves, had well-nigh prevailed upon me to pour out my soul in silence instead of publicly taking up the pen against you. But when I perceived the solicitude with which Mr. Wesley's preachers recommended your letters to Mr. Shirley in their respective congregations, and, above all, how many of God's people had been perplexed and distressed by reading them,—I say, when I perceived this to be the case, and had prayed to the Giver of all wisdom for direction, I could not but esteem it my indispensable duty to send out a few observations on your book, especially as no other person, that I know of, had made any reply to the doctrinal parts of it from the time of its publication. With regard to the '*Circular Letter*,' I shall studiously avoid the very mention of it; as whether the sending of it were in itself a wrong step or a right one, is of no consequence in the matter of salvation. Neither shall I follow you page by page, but taking the 'Minutes' in the order they stand, shall dwell upon them, more or less, as appears necessary."

The plan here propounded is carried out, but want of space renders it impossible to give an outline of Mr. Hill's theology. The following quotations must be taken as specimens of others which might be given:—

---

[1] A second edition, "revised and much enlarged," was published about the same time as Fletcher's "Third Check." The first edition consisted of forty pages, the second of fifty-two. There is nothing of importance, however, in the second issue which is not in the first, except a few acrid references to Wesley. The following may be taken as a specimen: "I shall make no remarks upon the poor, loose, flimsy manner in which the 'Minutes' are worded; but I cannot help observing that it seems almost impossible for Mr. Wesley to write a page without contradicting himself" (p. 50).

[2] In the second edition it is dated "Feb., 1772."

"Your argument is this; that, '*believing is previous to justification.*' But, dear Sir, this is begging the question; and, permit me to say, that I deny the assertion. Waving all disputes concerning eternal justification, or justification in the mind and purpose of God, I maintain, that, believing cannot possibly be previous to justification; and you must yourself maintain the same, unless you will adopt the phrase of *an unjustified believer;* whereas the Holy Ghost teaches that *all who believe are justified.* We may as well suppose that a man eats before he takes any food, and that he sees before he receives the light of the sun, as that he believes before he is justified: for believing, and feeding upon Christ, are not more inseparably connected than eating and taking bodily food, or than seeing and receiving light are inseparably connected. Yea, true faith can no more subsist without its object Christ, than there can be a marriage without a husband. From hence, I conclude, that the doctrine of believing before justification, and thereby making the grace of faith a conditional work, is not less contrary to reason than it is to Scripture itself."

"I most sincerely abhor the Minute, 'that we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works; according to the whole of our inward tempers, and our outward behaviour;' and, yet, I equally abhor the assertion, 'that David did not *displease* God more when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and imbrued his hands in her husband's blood, than when he danced before the ark.' I know, from Scripture authority, that when David committed the sin you allude to, the thing which he had done *displeased the Lord.* But, though I believe that David's *sin* displeased the Lord, must I therefore believe that David's *person* came under the curse of the law? and that, because he was ungrateful, God, whose gifts and callings are without repentance, was unfaithful? Surely no. David was still a son, though a perverse one. Like backsliding Ephraim, he was still a pleasant child, though he went on frowardly."

"Either Christ has fulfilled the whole law, and borne the curse, or He has not. If He has not, no soul can ever be saved; if He has, then all debts and claims against His people, be they more or be they less, be they small or be they great, be they before or be they after conversion, are for ever and for ever cancelled. All trespasses are forgiven them. They are justified from all things. They already have everlasting life. They are now (virtually) sat down in heavenly places with Christ their Forerunner; and as soon shall Satan pluck His crown from His head, as His purchase from His hand."

Such were some of the absurd and pernicious doctrines propounded by Mr. Hill, and which Fletcher felt it his duty to refute. Towards Wesley, there is, in Mr. Hill's pamphlet, an occasional stroke of bitterness, as, for instance, where he asserts that "there is a much nearer resemblance between the doctrines of Mr. John Wesley and mother Church'

(Popery) "than the popish Superior chose to acknowledge;"[1] but towards Fletcher, Mr. Hill, throughout, displays the most respectful kindness, and concludes his fifth and last letter thus:—

> "And now, dear Sir, I cannot conclude these letters without expressing my earnest desire that the contents of them may never cause any decrease of love and Christian fellowship between us. Pardon then, my dear Sir, I ardently beseech you, O pardon all that you have found amiss in the unworthy author of these epistles; and much, I am sure, your charity will have to overlook. If we cannot see things alike now, I hope the time is not far off when we shall be thoroughly united in sentiment, as well as in heart, and each of us, casting our crowns before the throne, shall join our voices in that one harmonious song of praise, with which the regions of bliss shall echo without intermission, and without end, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.' 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.'
>
> "In the meanwhile, let me acknowledge before the world that there is not a man living to whom I am more indebted for repeated instances of affection, and labours of love, than I am to dear Mr. Fletcher; and, therefore, notwithstanding all differences of judgment between us, I trust he will always give me leave to subscribe myself his most affectionate friend and brother, in the bonds of the Gospel of peace,
>
> "The Author of *Pietas Oxoniensis*."

This was worthy of Mr. Hill, who, eleven years afterwards, succeeded to the title and estates of his father, and became Sir Richard Hill, Bart.

Though Mr. Hill's *first* letter to Fletcher was dated as recently as December 2, 1771, the whole *five* were published, and Fletcher's answer to them committed to the press as early as the month of March,[2] 1772. Fletcher begins his "Third Check to Antinomianism" as follows:—

> "HONOURED AND DEAR SIR,—Accept my sincere thanks for the Christian courtesy with which you treat me in your five letters.
>
> "Some of our friends will undoubtedly blame us for not yet dropping the contest; but others will candidly consider that controversy, though

---

[1] The reference here is to Father Walsh, the Benedictine monk at Paris; and, it may be added, that, in a foot-note, Mr. Hill acknowledges himself to have been the author of the "Conversation" with that gentleman, recently published.

[2] The date, at the end of the Third Check, is "Madeley, February 3, 1772."

not desirable in itself, yet properly managed, has, a hundred times, rescued truth, groaning under the lash of triumphant error. We are indebted to our Lord's controversies with the Pharisees and Scribes for a considerable part of the four Gospels; and, to the end of the world, the Church will bless God for the spirited manner in which St. Paul, in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, defended the controverted point of a believer's present justification by faith; as well as for the steadiness with which St. James, St. John, St. Peter, and St. Jude carried on their important controversy with the Nicolaitans, who abased St. Paul's doctrine to Antinomian purposes.

"Had it not been for controversy, Romish priests would, to this day, feed us with Latin masses and a wafer-god. Some bold propositions, advanced by Luther against the doctrine of indulgences, unexpectedly brought on the Reformation. They were so irrationally attacked by the infatuated papists, and so scripturally defended by the resolute Protestants, that these kingdoms opened their eyes, and saw thousands of images and errors fall before the ark of evangelical truth.

"From what I have advanced in my *Second Check*, it appears, if I am not mistaken, that we stand now as much in need of a reformation from Antinomianism, as our ancestors did of a reformation from Popery; and I am not without hope that the extraordinary attack which has been made upon Mr. Wesley's anti-Crispian propositions, and the manner in which they are defended, will open the eyes of many, and check the rapid progress of so enchanting and pernicious an evil. This hope inspires me with fresh courage; and, turning from the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Shirley, I presume to face (I trust in the spirit of love and meekness) my new respectable opponent."

Fletcher's first purpose, in this important controversy, was to attack Antinomianism; now he was obliged to attack Calvinism, which, though the parent of Antinomianism, did not in the present instance approve of it. It is needless to recapitulate Fletcher's arguments in favour of the two doctrines, that all mankind are redeemed by the infinite sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, and that, through the same sacrifice, "*the* manifestation of the Spirit is given to *every man* to profit withal" (1 Cor. xii. 7). A few brief extracts, however, will help to illustrate his spirit, and his style of writing.

"The grace of God is as *the wind*, which *bloweth where it listeth;* and *it listeth* to blow, with more or less force successively, all over the earth. You can as soon meet with a man that never felt the wind, or *heard the sound thereof*, as with one that never felt the Divine breathings, or heard *the still small voice*, which we call the grace of God. To suppose the Lord gives us a thousand tokens of *His eternal power* *and Godhead*, without giving us a capacity to consider, and grace to improve them, is not less absurd than to imagine that when He bestowed upon Adam all the trees of paradise for food, He gave him no eyes to see, no hands to gather, and no mouth to eat their delicious fruits."

"Waiving the case of infants, idiots, and those who have *sinned the sin unto death*, was there ever a sinner under no obligation to repent and to believe in a merciful God? Oh, ye opposers of *free grace*, search the universe with Calvin's candle, and among your reprobated millions, find out the person who never had a merciful God; and show us the unfortunate creature, whom a sovereign God bound over to absolute despair of His mercy from the womb. If there is no such person in the world; if all men are bound to repent and to believe in a merciful God, there is an end of Calvinism. An unprejudiced man can require no stronger proof that all are redeemed from the curse of the Adamic law, which admitted of no repentance; and that the covenant of grace, which admits of, and makes provision for it, freely extends to all mankind.

"*Out of Christ's fulness all have received grace*, a *little leaven* of saving power, an inward monitor, a divine reprover, a ray of *true* heavenly *light*, which manifests first moral, and then spiritual good and evil. St. John *bears witness of that light*, and declares *it was* the spiritual *life of man*, the true light *which enlighteneth* not only *every man* that comes into the Church, but *every man that comes into the world*—without excepting those who are yet *in darkness*. *For the light shineth in darkness*, even when *the darkness comprehends it not*. The Baptist also bore *witness of that light,that all men through it*, not through him, *might believe;* φως, *light*, being the last antecedent, and agreeing perfectly with δἰ αυτου."

The reader has already seen Mr. Hill's strange and pernicious doctrine respecting eternal justification. Fletcher treats this Calvinistic dream with terrible though polite severity. Without attempting to condense his arguments, the following extract will serve to show his perfect victory over his respected opponent:—

"You go on, 'If Christ fulfilled the whole law and bore the curse, then all debts and claims against His people, be they more or be they less, be they small or be they great, be they before or be they after conversion, are for ever and for ever cancelled.'

"Your doctrine drags after it all the absurdities of eternal, absolute justification. It sets aside the use of repentance and faith, in order to pardon and acceptance. It represents the sins of the elect as forgiven not only before they are confessed, but even before they are committed. It supposes that all the penitents who have believed that they were once *children of wrath*, and that God was displeased at them when they lived in sin, have believed a lie. It makes the preaching of the

Gospel one of the most absurd, wicked, and barbarous things in the world. For what can be more absurd than to say, 'Repent ye, and believe the Gospel;' 'He that believeth not shall be damned;' if a certain number can *never repent or believe*, and a certain number can *never* be damned?"

In concluding his Treatise, Fletcher remarks:—

"If I have addressed my *Three Checks* to the Rev. Mr. Shirley and yourself" (Mr. Richard Hill), "God is my witness it was not to reflect upon two of the most eminent characters in the circle of my religious acquaintance. Forcible circumstances have over-ruled my inclinations. *Decipimur specie recti.* Thinking to attack error, you have attacked the very truth which Providence calls me to defend: and the attack appears to me so much the more dangerous as your laborious zeal and eminent piety are more worthy of public regard, than the boisterous rant and loose insinuations of twenty *practical* Antinomians. The tempter is not so great a novice in anti-Christian politics as to engage only *such* to plead for *doctrinal* Antinomianism. This would soon spoil the trade. It is his masterpiece of wisdom to get *good men* to do him that eminent service. He knows that their *good* lives will make way for their *bad* principles. Nor does he ever deceive with more decency and success than under the respectable cloak of their genuine piety.

"If a wicked man pleads for sin, *foenun habet in cornu*, he carries the mark on his forehead; we stand upon our guard. But when a good man gives us to understand that *there are no lengths God's people may not run*, *nor any depths they may not fall into*, without losing *the character of men after God's own heart*, that *many will praise God for* our *denial of Christ*, that *sin and corruption work for good*, that *a fall into adultery will drive us nearer to Christ*, and *make us sing louder to the praise of free grace;* when he quotes Scripture too, in order to support these assertions, calling them the pure Gospel, and representing the opposite doctrine as the Pelagian heresy, worse than popery itself,—he *casts the* Antinomian *net on the right side of the ship*, and is likely to enclose a great multitude of unwary men; especially if some of the *best* hands in the kingdom drive the frighted shoal into the net, and help to drag it to shore.

"This is, honoured Sir, what you have done, not designedly, but thinking to do God service. Hence the steadiness with which I have looked in the face a man of God, whose feet I should be glad to wash at any time, under a lively sense of my great inferiority. I beg you not to consider the unceremonious plainness of a Swiss mountaineer as the sarcastic insolence of an incorrigible Arminian.

"By a mistake, fashionable among religious people, you have unhappily paid more regard to Dr. Crisp than to St. James. And, as you have pleaded the dangerous cause of the impenitent monarch, I have addressed you with the honest boldness of the expostulating prophet. I have said to my honoured opponent, '*Thou art the man!*'

"I owe much respect to you, but more to truth, to conscience, and to God. If, in trying to discharge my duty towards them, I have inadvertently betrayed any want of respect to you, I humbly ask your pardon; and I can assure you, in the face of the whole world, that notwithstanding your strong attachment to the peculiarities of Dr. Crisp, as there is no family in the world to which I am under greater obligations than yours, so there are few gentlemen for whom I have so peculiar an esteem, as for the respectable author of *Pietas Oxoniensis*."

"Before I lay down my pen," says Fletcher, in a "Postscript," "I beg leave to address, a moment, the *true* believers who espouse Calvin's sentiments. Think not, honoured brethren, that I have no eyes to see the eminent services which many of you render to the Church of Christ; no heart to bless God for the Christian graces which shine in your exemplary conduct; no pen to testify, that, by letting your light shine before men, you adorn the Gospel of God our Saviour, as many of your predecessors have done before you. I am not only persuaded that your opinions are consistent with a genuine conversion but I take heaven to witness how much I prefer a Calvinist who loves God to a Remonstrant who does not. If I have, therefore, taken the liberty of exposing your favourite mistakes, do me the justice to believe that it was not to pour contempt upon your respectable persons; but to set your peculiarities in such a light as might either engage you to renounce them, or check the forwardness with which some have lately recommended them as the only *doctrines of grace*, and the *pure Gospel* of Jesus Christ; unkindly representing their remonstrant brethren as enemies to free grace, and abettors of a dreadful heresy.

"And you, my remonstrant brethren, permit me to offer you some seasonable advices. 1. More than ever, let us confirm our love to our Calvinist brethren. If our arguments gall them, let us not envenom the sore by maliciously triumphing over them. Nothing is more likely to provoke their displeasure, and drive them from what we believe to be the truth. 2. Do not rejoice in the *mistakes* of our opponents, but in the *detection* of error. Desire not that *we*, but that *truth* may prevail. Let us not only be willing that our brethren should win the day if they have *truth* on their side; but let us make it matter of solemn, earnest, and constant prayer. 3. Let us strictly observe the rules of decency and kindness, taking care not to treat any of our opponents in the same manner that they have treated Mr. Wesley. The men of the world sometimes hint that he is a papist, and a Jesuit; but good, mistaken men have gone much farther in the present controversy. They have published to the world, that they *verily believe his principles are too rotten for even a papist to rest upon*; that he *wades through the quagmires of Pelagianism*, deals in *inconsistencies, manifest contradictions, and strange prevarications*; that if *a contrast were drawn from his various assertions upon the doctrine of sinless perfection, a little piece might extend into a folio volume*; and that they are *more than ever convinced of his prevaricating disposition*. Not satisfied with going to a Benedictine monk, in Paris, for help against his *dreadful heresy*, they have wittily extracted an argument, *ad hominem*, from *the comfortable dish of tea he drinks with Mrs. Wesley;* and, to complete the demonstration of their respect for that grey-headed, laborious minister of Christ, they have brought him upon the stage of controversy in a dress of their own contriving, and made him declare to the world, that, *whenever he and fifty-three of his fellow-labourers say one thing, they mean quite another.* And what has he done to deserve this usage at *their* hands? Which of *them* has he treated unjustly or unkindly? Even in the course of this controversy, has he injured any man? May he not say to this hour, *Tu pugnas; ego vapulo tantum?* Let us avoid this warmth, my brethren; remembering that personal reflections will never pass for convincing arguments with the judicious and humane.

"I have endeavoured to follow this advice with regard to Dr. Crisp; nevertheless, lest you should rank him with *practical* Antinomians, I once more gladly protest my belief that he was a *good* man; and desire that none of you would condemn *all* his sermons, much less his *character*, on account of his unguarded antinomian propositions.

"4. If you would help us to remove the prejudices of our brethren, not only grant with a good grace, but strongly insist upon the great truths for which they make so noble a stand. Steadily assert, with them, that the scraps of morality and formality, by which Pharisees and deists pretend to merit the Divine favour, are only *filthy rags* in the sight of a holy God; and that no righteousness is current in heaven but the *righteousness which is of God by faith.* If they have set their hearts upon calling it *the imputed righteousness of Christ*, though the expression is not strictly scriptural, let it pass; but give them to understand, that as *Divine* imputation of righteousness is a most glorious *reality*, so *human* imputation is a most delusive *dream;* and that of this sort is undoubtedly the *Calvinian imputation* of righteousness to a man, who actually defiles his neighbour's bed, and betrays innocent blood. A dangerous contrivance this! not less subversive of common heathenish morality, than of St. James's *pure and undefiled religion.*

"Again, our Calvinist brethren excel in setting forth a *part* of Christ's priestly office; I mean the immaculate purity of His most holy life, and the all-atoning, all-meritorious sacrifice of His bloody death. Here imitate, and, if possible, surpass them. Shout a *finished atonement* louder than they. If they call this complete atonement *finished salvation*, or *the finished work of Christ*, indulge them still: for peace's sake, let those expressions pass; nevertheless, at proper times, give them to understand that it is absolutely contrary to reason, Scripture, and Christian experience to think that *all* Christ's mediatorial work is *finished.* Insinuate you should be very miserable if He had nothing more to do *for* you and *in* you. Tell them, as they can bear it, that He works *daily* as a *Prophet* to enlighten you; as a *Priest* to make intercession for you; as a *King* to subdue your enemies; as a *Redeemer* to deliver you out of all your troubles; and as a *Saviour* to help you to work out your own salvation; and hint that, in all these respects, Christ's work is no more finished than the working of our own salvation is completed.

"The judicious will understand you; as for bigots, they are proof against Scripture and good sense. Nevertheless, mild irony, sharply pointing a scriptural argument, may yet pass between the joints of their impenetrable armour, and make them feel either some shame, or some weariness of contention. But this is a dangerous method, which I would recommend to very few. None should dip his pen in the wine of irony, till he has dipped it in the oil of love; and even then, he should not use it without constant prayer, and as much caution as a surgeon lances an impostume. If he goes too deep, he does mischief; if not deep enough, he loses his time; the virulent humour is not discharged, but irritated by the skin-deep operation. And 'who is sufficient for these things?' Gracious God of wisdom and love! if Thou callest us to this difficult and thankless office, let all our sufficiency be of Thee! and should the operation succeed, Thine and Thine alone shall be all the glory."

Such advices were Christian and opportune. No doubt, they were meant for men like Thomas Olivers and Walter Sellon. Wesley, in a tract of twelve pages, had, in 1770, attacked Toplady's "Abridgement of Zanchius on Predestination." Toplady, in the same year, had replied to this, in a most bitter and scurrilous "Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley." Not having leisure for this kind of work, Wesley had requested Olivers to answer Toplady. Olivers, in 1771, had published his "Letter to the Reverend Mr. Toplady" (12mo, 60 pp.), and had treated Toplady with an amount of well-deserved tartness, which quite justified Fletcher in giving the above advice.

Then, again, Walter Sellon, in the same year, 1771, had published his "Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Absolute Predestination, as is stated and asserted by the Translator of Jerome Zanchius, in his Letter to the Rev. Dr. Nowell. Together with Some Animadversions on his Translation of Zanchius, his Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, and his Sermon on 1 Tim. i. 10." 12mo, 129 pp. In his small country parish, Ledsham, in Yorkshire, Sellon had dealt Toplady's predestination theory heavy blows; and, it must be added, he had not been sparing in virulence. He began with telling the abusive vicar of Broad Hembury, "I shall deal plainly with you; more plainly, perhaps, than you might *desire;* yet not so plainly as you might *justly expect.* I would not say a word *barely* to enrage you; and yet, I doubt not, but I shall *enrage* you, because there is no coping with such writers as you, without speaking a little in your own manner; and I have always observed, those that are most prone to *give* offence are also most prone to *take* it." Sellon fulfilled his threatening promise, and concluded: "Excuse my plainness, Sir, if I tell you farther, you seem much to stand in need of learning the lesson dictated by Solon of Athens, '*Know thyself;*' and of praying heartily that prayer prescribed by our Church, '*From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness,—Good Lord, deliver us!*'"

Fletcher, in this irritating controversy, never lost his temper. Some of his coadjutors and opponents did; and hence the Christian and needed cautions and advices at the end of his "Third Check to Antinomianism."

CHAPTER XI.

"FOURTH CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM."

1772.

THE issue of Fletcher's "Third Check" was immediately followed by "A Review of all the Doctrines taught by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley; containing a full and particular Answer to a Book entitled, 'A Second Check to Antinomianism. In Six Letters, to the Author of that Book. Wherein the Doctrines of a Twofold Justification, Free-Will, Man's Merit, Sinless Perfection, Finished Salvation, and Real Antinomianism are particularly discussed; and the Puritan Divines vindicated from the Charges brought against them of holding Mr. Wesley's Doctrines.' To which is added 'A Farrago.' London, 1772." 8vo, 151 pp. The letters are all signed "The Author of P.O.," meaning, of course, Richard Hill.

Almost at the same time that the book, with this ponderous title, was published, Mr. Richard Hill committed to the press an 8vo tract of sixteen pages, entitled, "Some Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled, A Third Check to Antinomianism. By the Author of '*Pietas Oxoniensis.*'"

Of the second of these publications nothing need be said. Considerable bitterness towards Wesley is displayed, and a modicum of severity towards Fletcher; but, perhaps, not more than might be naturally expected; for men dislike to be vanquished.

His first and much larger pamphlet, containing, besides the "Farrago," "Six Letters" addressed to Fletcher, must have more attention. The "Letters" relate, not to the "*Third*," but the "Second Check" of Fletcher, and were published only a few days before the appearance of the

"Remarks" just noticed. Mr. Hill thus commences his first letter :—

> "REVEREND SIR,—After many debates with myself, and much solicitation from my friends, you now hear from me again on your *Second Check to Antinomianism*. I make no other apology for writing, than that I think there is an absolute necessity an answer should be given to it. But, whilst I make my animadversions on your letters, may the Divine Author of love and meekness preserve me from the unhappy spirit in which they are written ! Oh, my dear Sir, I never could have supposed that sneer, banter, and sarcasm, yea notorious falsehood, calumny, and gross perversions, would have appeared before the world under the sanction of your venerable name."

In making such accusations, Mr. Hill ought to have known he was himself guilty of "notorious falsehood and calumny;" but he was angry, and anger is always blindfolding.

Mr. Hill next proceeds to denounce Wesley's "doctrine of *a second justification by works ;*" and asserts that "it has no existence in the Word of God, nor in any Protestant Church under heaven ;" but that, in this matter, "Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher have the whole Council of Trent on their side."

With considerable ability, but with great bitterness and even reviling, especially so far as Wesley is concerned, Mr. Hill endeavours to refute Fletcher's arguments in support of the doctrine just named, and then remarks :—

> "I intended to have made several other extracts from your first letter; but as I really cannot find many lines together free from gross misrepresentations and perversions, and hardly one single paragraph exempt from cutting sneers and low sarcasms, I confess I have not patience to transcribe them ; especially when I consider that they are addressed to one" (Walter Shirley) "who, notwithstanding your former unkind behaviour, hath treated you with all the politeness of a gentleman, and the humility of a Christian."

This was an ebullition of bad temper. The charges are untrue, and the spirit is unchristian. Fletcher employed irony, but, as all candid readers of his Checks must acknowledge, it was always polite and decorous. None but irritated men, like Mr. Hill, can find "low sarcasms ;" and as for "gross misrepresentations and perversions," they have no existence.

In his Second Letter, Mr. Hill takes up the doctrine of free-will, and pronounces Fletcher's statements, in support of the free agency of man, to be "as totally void of solid scriptural argument, as they are replete with calumny, gross perversions, and equivocations."

In his Third Letter, Mr. Hill discusses what he is pleased to call *Sinless* Perfection,—a doctrine which neither Wesley nor Fletcher ever taught. *Christian* Perfection[1] they enforced and defended; but *Sinless* Perfection, using the word in its strict and literal sense, was not a dogma of theirs, but a verbal invention, adopted from Whitefield and others, by Mr. Hill and his angry friends, who desired to make their opponents the target of ridicule and scorn.

Mr. Hill begins with several revolting anecdotes respecting people who professed themselves to be *perfect* Christians,—stories which probably were true; but stories concerning *perfect* fanatics whom Wesley and Fletcher would have condemned as strongly as Mr. Hill. His Letter terminates with a series of the same sort of nauseous anecdotes. In a certain sense, it is smart, and Mr. Hill thought it so; for, in concluding it, he remarks:—

> "Now, my dear Sir, I have given you a little in your own way; but, notwithstanding you have set me the example in this manner of writing, I shall be glad to set you the example of mutual forgiveness. By cutting and slashing, we shall never convince each other of our errors; and the end of our controversy will be, that the world will laugh at you for taking the sword of banter, the shield of perversion, the helmet of prejudice, and the breastplate of acrimony, in order to fight for the doctrine of sinless perfection; and I myself shall be laughed at, in my turn, for losing so much precious time in answering you."

Mr. Hill's fourth letter is a brief one, and is devoted to what he calls Fletcher's "heavy bombs of bitter sneer and cutting sarcasm," hurled at the doctrine of "*the finished salvation of Christ.*"

The fifth and sixth letters, and also the postscript, are not theological, but simply abusive. Fletcher is said to

---

[1] The reader who wishes to know what is meant by this is strongly recommended to read Wesley's invaluable treatise, entitled, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection;" his equally important and scriptural sermon on "Christian Perfection," and his other irrefutable sermons on the same subject.

"have traduced all the most celebrated ministers of the Gospel" of that day; and to have "thrown stumbling-blocks into the way of thousands." A "wretched spirit of low sarcasm and slanderous banter runs throughout" his whole writings. Wesley and Fletcher had "adopted a scheme of religion gathered out of Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Popery, Mysticism, and Quakerism."

The "Farrago of Hot and Cold Medicines, by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, extracted from his own Publications," is, of course, principally levelled against Wesley. The spirit of it may be gathered from an extract from Bishop Hall, on the title-page of Mr. Hill's ill-natured pamphlet:—

> "I would I knew where to find you; then I could take a direct aim. Whereas now I must rove and conjecture. To-day you are in the tents of the Romanists; to-morrow, in ours; next day, between both, against both. Our adversaries think you ours, we theirs; your conscience finds you with both and neither. I flatter you not; this of yours is the worst of all tempers. *Will you be a church alone?* Alas! how full are you of contradictions to yourself! How full of contrary purposes! How oft do you chide with yourself? How oft do you fight with yourself?"

Of course, all this was provoking. Had Fletcher been of a much less combative disposition than he really was, it would have been impossible for him, as a man of honesty and honour, to lay aside his pen. Mr. Hill's accusations were serious ones, involving Fletcher's moral character; and a reply to them was imperative. But, before Fletcher's "Fourth Check to Antinomianism" is introduced to the reader's notice, another publication, which preceded it, must be mentioned. This was entitled "Friendly Remarks occasioned by the Spirit and Doctrines contained in the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication, and more particularly in his Second Check to Antinomianism, to which is added a postscript, occasioned by his Third Check. In a letter to the Author, by * * * * * * * * * * *. A.M. London: 1772." 8vo. 71 pp. The letter is dated, "London, July 4, 1772," and the asterisks stand for the name of Rowland Hill, Mr. Richard Hill's impulsive and eccentric brother, who had taken his degree at Cambridge, had been refused orders by half-a-dozen bishops, and was now nearly twenty-seven years of age. Berridge and Whitefield had been his friends, and even Wesley had approved of his preaching among his Societies.[1] At present, he was in London, discoursing to immense congregations in Whitefield's two Metropolitan Chapels, and was resident in the Tabernacle House, in Moorfields.[2] There, no doubt, the pamphlet was written, which must now be noticed.

He begins with a reference to his extensive preaching tours; and states that he was frequently invited to preach in the meeting-houses of Wesley's Societies, and that this occasioned him considerable perplexity, for to preach against Wesley's "sentiments in his own congregations would be unfair." He continues:—

> "And yet, when I consider how many excellent Christians are contained in Mr. Wesley's Societies, whom I love as my own soul, and to whom I have frequently given promises of my assistance and labours, how will it grieve me to be constrained to withdraw from them, whom I so much honour and respect."

Rowland Hill proceeds to say, that "hitherto he had declined having the least share in the late contentions." He was at Bristol in 1771, when Mr. Shirley and his friends invaded Wesley's Conference, but he refused to join them, and left the city, for, he remarks, "Peace I love, but controversy I hate." He continues:—

> "Upon my return to Bristol, I saw your first publication.[3] As I dearly loved your character, I read it with great prejudice in your favour; but still, the *tartness* of the style, as well as the bad doctrine it contained, concerned me; but, as I plainly perceived your intention was to make the '*Minutes*' speak as much Gospel as possible, though I was sorry for the performance, I felt a loving pity for the author. About the same time, I called upon Mr. Wesley, then in Bristol, and, in strong terms, expressed to him my concern about his '*Minutes*.' He told me that he looked upon the whole of them as truth, and that he should vindicate them as such.
>
> "Still my determination was to appear in no open separation from Mr. Wesley; hoping that time would soften the edge of the dispute, and restore calmness and composure among contending parties; but your *second* publication[4] compels me to believe that to be neutral any

---

[1] Sidney's "Life of Rowland Hill," p. 56.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 70.
[3] The "Vindication" of Wesley's Minutes.
[4] "Second Check to Antinomianism, in Three Letters," to Mr. Shirley.

> longer will be criminal. You have now done sufficient to darken every gleam of hope of future tranquillity, by publishing *such* doctrine, and in *such* a spirit, as has kindled no small flame in the religious world."

No doubt Rowland Hill was perfectly sincere when he said he hated controversy, and loved peace; and yet, such is the tendency of polemical writing, Rowland Hill and his brother Richard became the principal fomentors of this controversial warfare.

Having given what he calls "a simple narration of facts," Mr. Rowland Hill proceeds to say:—

> "I will now make some strictures principally upon your last performance. This I pray God I may be enabled to do with meekness and judgment. I know there is no *argument* in *banter*, nor *conclusion* in *sarcasm*, nor *divinity* in a *sneer:* such weapons I wish totally to discard; they are *pitiful* even for the world, but they are *scandalous* when used by a Christian. I hate such feeble aids, and will scorn to use them; they would defile my soul, and stab the cause I mean to maintain. The meek and dove-like disposition of Christ, I humbly hope will teach me, while I write, to *pity*, not to *abuse*, the mistaken; and meekly to deliver my sentiments, without having recourse to the *low arts* of *slander* and *reflection.*

Rowland Hill had good intentions; but whether he fulfilled them will be seen in the succeeding extracts.

> "After having first dressed up Mr. Shirley according to your own fancy, and branded him with the opprobrious *name* of *Antinomian*, you place him at the head of a set of monsters invented by yourself; and, after having thus raised a hideous and unthought-of ghost, you remand it to the shades by your own spells and incantations of *banter* and *contempt.*"
>
> "After having said so much as to place us in a manner even amongst *murderers*, on account of our principles of grace, it really shocks and almost disheartens me from following you any further. I will, therefore, now omit reminding you of the numberless *sneers*, *taunts*, and *sarcasms*, which so dreadfully decorate the whole of your performance; they are nothing better than the infernal *terms of darkness;* it is *hateful* to transcribe them; *let darkness be their doom.*"
>
> "Consider in what detestable colours you have pictured us before the world. There is scarce an abomination but what we are charged with; and our enemies triumph at the supposed discovery. You are the man, they say, that has been among the *Calvinists*, has found out their hypocrisy, and are now publishing against them. Numbers of them, to my knowledge, carry about your book in ill-natured triumph, and cast in our teeth, as certain truth, the *dreadful slanders* you have

invented. In short, Sir, you have brought over us such a day of *blasphemy* and *rebuke* as we never felt before."

"Our characters now lie bleeding before you; we smart severely under the cruelty of your pen; and complain loudly against your great injustice. You have given us up to be trampled upon by the world, who, from your *pretended* discoveries, looks upon us all as hypocrites detected under the mask of religion. If you think us in error, for Christ's sake, *sneer* at us no more; though it may be *sport* to you, it is, in a manner, *death* to us. Learn the more Christian lesson to pity us, and pray for us, and try to set us right in love."

Rowland Hill, no doubt, intended to avoid in his pamphlet "*the low art of slander;*" but he failed in carrying out his purpose. Any one who has read, with candour, Fletcher's first and second Checks to Antinomianism, must admit that Mr. Hill's accusations are unfounded. Where had Fletcher slandered Rowland Hill, or any of his Calvinistic friends? It is true that he had treated some of the *doctrines* of the Calvinists with "*banter,*" and with "*sarcasm;*" but his Calvinian friends, against whose tenets he had written, had, uniformly, been treated with respectful affection. Impetuous Rowland improperly applied Fletcher's "*banter*" and "*sarcasm,*" not to *doctrines*, as Fletcher had intended, but to the *men* who held them, himself and his godly friends included; a thing from which Fletcher's loving soul revolted.

The remainder of Rowland Hill's "Friendly Remarks" chiefly consists of animadversions, intended to show "the glaring inconsistencies and palpable mistakes" of Fletcher, in the doctrines he had defended and enforced. It would be an almost endless task to dwell upon the theological criticisms of Fletcher and his opponents. As might be expected, Rowland Hill, in attacking Fletcher's tenets, is often smart; and, it must be added, often bitter.

A reply to the pamphlets of Richard Hill and his brother Rowland became a necessity. Fletcher could not remain silent under such unfounded and undeserved imputations. Hence, though weary of the warfare, he at once resumed his pen, and began to prepare his "Fourth Check to Antinomianism." The postscript of Rowland Hill's "Friendly Remarks," dated "July 4, 1772," states that the "Third Check" had just "made its appearance." The fourth was published before the year was ended, and bore the title of

"Logica Genevensis; or, a Fourth Check to Antinomianism, in which St. James's Pure Religion is defended against the Charges, and established upon the Concessions of Mr. Richard and Mr. Rowland Hill. In a Series of Letters to those Gentlemen, by the Vindicator of the Minutes. Bristol: Printed by William Pine, 1772." 12mo. 245 pp. The letters are thirteen in number, and all of them are addressed to Mr. Richard Hill, except the ninth, which is addressed "to Mr. Rowland Hill," and the tenth and eleventh written to the two brothers conjointly. The thirteenth, and last, is dated, "Madeley, Nov. 15, 1772."[1]

Meanwhile, Wesley published "Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review of all the Doctrines taught by Mr. John Wesley." This is not the place to analyse Wesley's 12mo. pamphlet of 54 pages, but the following extract from it may be acceptable:—

> "With regard to Mr. Hill's objections to Mr. Fletcher, I refer all candid men to his own writings—his letters, entitled a 'First, Second, and Third Check to Antinomianism;' the rather, because there are very few of his arguments which Mr. Hill even *attempts* to answer. 'Tis true he promises 'a full and particular answer to Mr. Fletcher's "Second Check to Antinomianism";' but it will puzzle any one to find where that answer is except in the title-page. And if anything more is needful to be done, Mr. Fletcher is still able to answer for himself. But if he does, I would recommend to his consideration the advice formerly given by a wise man to his friend, 'See that you humble not yourself to that man; it would hurt both him and the cause of God.' 'Tis pity but he had considered it sooner, and he might have escaped some keen reflections. But he did not. He imagined when he spoke or wrote in the simplicity of his heart, that his opponents would have received his words in the same spirit wherein they were spoken; but they turn them all into poison. He not only *loses his sweet words*, but they are turned into bitterness—are interpreted as mere *sneer* and *sarcasm!* A good lesson for *me.* I had designed to have transcribed Mr. Fletcher's character of Mr. Hill, and to have added a little thereto,

---

[1] The semi-infidel *Monthly Review*, which could hardly exist without sneering at evangelical religion, remarked concerning this Fourth Check to Antinomianism:—

"Mr. Fletcher continues to push the Calvinists with unremitting vigour. He here encounters two formidable adversaries at once. The veteran Wesley, who now, perhaps, thinks it time to retire from the well-fought field, is fortunate in having so zealous an auxiliary." (*Monthly Review*, 1773, p. 240.)

in hope of softening his spirit. But I see it is in vain; as well might one hope to soften

'Inexorable Pluto, king of shades.'

Since he is capable of putting such a construction even upon Mr. Fletcher's gentleness and mildness; since he ascribes even to him 'a pen dipped in gall,' what will he not ascribe to *me?* I have done therefore with humbling myself to these men—to Mr. Hill and his associates. I have humbled myself to them for these thirty years, but will do it no more. I have done with attempting to soften their spirits; it is all lost labour" (pp. 3, 4).

Having come to such a determination, it need not be added that Wesley's pamphlet was one of the most trenchant he ever published.

Wesley was in Shropshire in the month of August, and probably had an interview with Fletcher. It is not unlikely that Fletcher accompanied Wesley in his journey to Bristol; but if this were not the case, it is certain that he soon after followed him. Hence the following hitherto unpublished letter, written by John Pawson, an itinerant preacher of ten years' standing:—

"BRISTOL, *September* 29, 1772.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—Mr. Wesley came here on Saturday, August 29, and has been with us ever since, but intends to leave Bristol next Monday" [October 5]. "He seems to be as zealous and active in his Master's service as ever, and quite in good health. We have also had the great Mr. Fletcher here, but he is now returned to Madeley. He seems to be an eminent saint indeed. I had the satisfaction to hear him twice. He is a lively, zealous preacher; the power of God seems to attend his word; yet I admire him much more as a writer than as a preacher. Being a foreigner, there is a kind of roughness attends his language that is not grateful to an English hearer; and the English not being his mother-tongue, he sometimes seems to be at a loss for words. Yet he certainly is a great and blessed man.

"We have had very large congregations to hear both Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher, especially the latter; and I hope we shall see the fruit of their preaching in a little time. I trust that our gracious Lord will be with us, and that we shall have a prosperous year; though I apprehend it will be attended with greater difficulties than ever to keep the people together in Bristol. We have the Tabernacle[1] on one hand, and Mr. Janes,[2] who has a meeting in Tucker Street, on the other.

---

[1] Whitefield had a Tabernacle at Kingswood; and Lady Huntingdon, in 1753, built one in Bristol, which Whitefield opened.

[2] Thomas Janes, who from 1767 to 1770 was one of Wesley's itinerants. His health not being equal to the rough work of a Methodist preacher

Mr. Roquet[1] also is disaffected towards us. He has been in London for some time with his dear friend Mr. Hill. One night he preached in the Foundery, where he gave universal offence by using many Calvinistical phrases, and by telling the whole congregation that he knew there were whores and bawds even in the Bands[2] in Bristol. He said, 'These eyes have seen it, and this heart has groaned on account of it.' How he will be when he returns I know not; but these are the accounts we hear from London. Were it not that so many of our people are so exceedingly unstable, we need not fear any of these things; but you well know that many of them have got itching ears, and will run about, say or do what we will.

"Mr. Wesley has just published his answer to Mr. Hill. I suppose it will make the Calvinists exceeding angry; but I think Mr. Fletcher's 'Fourth Check,' which is now in the press, will make them much more so, as he does not spare them at all, but endeavours to show, in the clearest manner, the horrible consequences of their beloved opinions. He is writing something upon Perfection, the former part of which I have seen; and I think he will set that doctrine in so Scriptural a light, as to stop the mouths of gainsayers."

Fletcher dedicated his "Fourth Check to Antinomianism" "to all candid Calvinists in the Church of England." An extract from this dedication may be useful, as giving, in a brief form, some of the doctrines which Fletcher had defended and enforced, and which had so hugely offended his Calvinistic friends.

"They" [his opponents] "will try to frighten you from reading this book, by protesting that I throw down the foundation of Christianity and help Mr. Wesley to place *works* and *merit* on the Redeemer's throne. To this dreadful charge I answer:—1. That I had rather my right hand should lose its cunning to all eternity, than use it a moment to detract from the Saviour's *real* glory. 2. That the strongest pleas I produce for holiness and good works are quotations from the Homilies of our own Church as well as from the Puritan divines, whom I cite preferably to others, because they held what you are taught to call the *doctrines of grace*. 3. That what I have said of those doctrines recommends itself to every unprejudiced person's reason and conscience. 4. That my capital arguments in favour of practical Christianity are

---

he settled as the pastor of a dissenting congregation in Bristol. He died in 1773. He was a man of considerable abilities, and compiled and published a volume which he entitled "The Beauties of the Poets."

[1] One of the first masters of Wesley's Kingswood School, but now an ordained clergyman of the Church of England, and curate of St. Werburgh in Bristol. He was an intimate friend of Lady Huntingdon.

[2] The Band-meetings of the Methodists, consisting of persons selected from the Methodist classes.

> founded upon our second justification by the evidence of good works in the great day; a doctrine which my opponent himself cannot help assenting to. 5. That from first to last, when the *meritorious cause* of our justification is considered, we set works aside; praying God *not to enter into judgment with us*, or *weigh our merits*, but to *pardon our offences* for Christ's sake; and gladly ascribing the whole of our salvation to His alone merits, as much as Calvin or Dr. Crisp does. 6. That when the word *meriting*, *deserving*, or *worthy*, which our Lord uses again and again, is applied to good works or good men, we mean absolutely nothing but *rewardable*, or qualified for the reception of a *gracious reward*. And 7. That even this *improper* merit or rewardableness of good works is entirely derived from Christ's *proper* merit, who works what is good in us; and from the gracious promise of God, who has freely engaged Himself to recompense the fruits of righteousness, which His own free grace enables us to produce."

In the first eight of his letters, Fletcher quotes copiously from the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies of the Church of England, and from the writings of Puritan divines. He also minutely examines Mr. Richard Hill's objections to his doctrines and to his Scriptural expositions. Up to this point there is a comparative absence of his cutting irony; but there is a great amount of powerful and triumphant writing.

In his ninth letter, addressed to Rowland Hill, he naturally enough lays aside the restraint he had put upon himself. Richard Hill was now a man of matured life, forty years of age; his brother Rowland was a young man of only twenty-seven. The former had not been sparing in the use of acrimonious epithets; the latter had been lavish. No wonder that Fletcher spared not his youthful opponent. He wrote:—

> "What reason have you to assert, as you do, that I '*have grossly misrepresented the Scriptures*,' and 'made *universal havoc of every truth of the Gospel*'? The first of these charges is heavy, the second dreadful. Let us see by what arguments they are supported. After throwing away a good part of your book in passing a long, Calvinian, juvenile sentence upon my spirit as a writer, you come at last to the point, and attempt to explain some of the Scriptures which you suppose I have 'misrepresented.'"

Fletcher proceeds to examine what he calls "the arguments" of Rowland Hill; and then concludes, as follows:—

> "Having answered your objections to what you justly call 'the prin-

cipal cause of the controversy among us,' I may make one or two observations upon the *friendliness* of your '*Friendly Remarks.*'

"Candid reader, if thou hast read my Checks without prejudice, and attentively compared them with the Word of God, wouldest thou ever think that the following lines contain an extract from the *friendly* sentence, which my young opponent passes upon them?—'Hard names, banter, sarcasm, sneer, abuse, bravado, low arts of slander, slanderous accusation, opprobrious name, ill-natured satire, odious, deformed, detestable colours, unfair and ungenerous treatment, terms void of truth, unmerciful condemnations, false humility, irritating spirit, provoking, uncharitable style, continual sneers, most odious appellations, abusive words, notorious scandalizing, lines too dreadful to be transcribed, unworthy of an answer, beneath contempt, most indecent ridicule, a wretched conclusion, as bitter as gall, *and* slanders which ought even to make a Turk blush.'

"If thou canst not yet see, gentle reader, into the nature of Mr. Rowland Hill's '*Remarks,*' peruse the following *friendly* sentences. 'In regard to the fopperies of religion, you certainly differ from the Popish priest of Madeley. You have made universal havoc of every truth of the Gospel. You have invented dreadful slanders. You plentifully stigmatize many with the most unkindly language. You have blackened our principles, and scandalized our practice. You place us in a manner among murderers. It shocks me to follow you. Our characters lie bleeding under the cruelty of your pen, and complain loudly against your great injustice. Blush for the characters you have injured by the rashness and bitterness of your pen. You have invented a set of monsters, and raised a hideous ghost, by your own spells and incantations of banter and contempt. Numberless sneers, taunts, and sarcasms dreadfully decorate the whole of your performance: they are nothing better than infernal terms of darkness, which it is hateful to transcribe.'

"When I cast my eyes upon this extract, I cannot help crying out, 'If this is my antagonist's *friendliness,* alas! what will be his *displeasure?* And what have I done to deserve these tokens of Calvinian benevolence? Why are these flowers of Geneva rhetoric so plentifully heaped upon my head?

"Sir, I do not intimate that I have done nothing displeasing to you. Far from insinuating it, I shall present my readers with a list of the manifold, but well-meant provocations, which have procured me your public correspondence. I say, *well-meant provocations;* for all I want to *provoke* any one *to* is *love and good works.*

"1. I have written my Checks with the *confidence* with which the clear dictates of reason, and the full testimonies of Scripture, usually inspire those who love what they esteem truth more than they do their dearest friends.

"2. After speaking most honourably of *many Calvinists,* even of all that are *pious,* I have taken the liberty to insinuate, that the schemes of *finished salvation,* and *imputed righteousness,* will no more save a

Calvinist guilty of *practical* Antinomianism, than the doctrine of *general redemption* will save an ungodly remonstrant. Thus I have made no difference between the *backsliding elect* of the Lock,[1] and the *apostates* of the Foundery, when death overtakes them in their sins, and in their blood.

"3. I have maintained that our Lord did not speak an untruth when He said, *In the day of judgment, by thy words shalt thou be justified;* and that St. Paul did not propagate heresy when he wrote, *Work out your own salvation.*

"4. I have sprinkled with the salt of irony your favourite doctrine ('Friendly Remarks,' p. 39), 'Salvation wholly depends upon the purpose of God according to election, without any respect to what may be in them,' *i.e. the elect.* Now, Sir, as by the doctrine of undeniable consequences, he who receives a guinea with the *king's head* on the one side cannot but receive the *lions* on the other side; so he that admits the preceding proposition, cannot but admit the inseparable counterpart, namely, the following proposition, which every attentive and unprejudiced person sees written in blood upon that side of Calvin's standard which is generally kept out of sight, 'Damnation wholly depends upon the purpose of God according to reprobation, without respect to what may be in the reprobates.' Here is no 'inventing a monstrous creed,' but merely turning the leaf of your own, and reading what is written there, namely, *damnation finished,* evidently answering to *finished salvation.*"

Fletcher admits that he had used irony in his Checks, not, however, because he liked it, but because he found it needful. He writes :—

"If I make use of irony in my Checks, it is not from '*spleen,*' but *reason.* It appears to *me* that the subject requires it, and that *ridiculous error* is to be turned out of the temple of truth, not only with scriptural argument, which is *the sword of the Spirit,* but also with *mild irony,* which is a proper scourge for a glaring and obstinate mistake."

Holding such a view, he introduces, in one of the two letters addressed to Richard and Rowland Hill unitedly, an illustration of the absurdities involved in Calvinism, which, perhaps, is as severe as anything that his Checks contain. The extract is long, but must be given unabridged.

"You decry 'illustrations,' and I do not wonder at it; for they carry light into Babel, where it is not desired. The father of error begets *darkness* and *confusion.* From darkness and confusion springs *Calvinism,* who, wrapping himself up in some garments he has stolen from the truth, deceives the nations, and gets himself reverenced in a dark temple, as if he were the pure and free Gospel.

---

[1] The Lock Hospital, where Martin Madan was Chaplain.

"To bring him to a *shameful* end, we need not stab him with the dagger of '*calumny*,' or put him upon the rack of *persecution*. Let him only be dragged out of his obscurity, and brought unmasked to open light. The silent beams of truth will pierce him through! Light alone will torture him to death, as the meridian sun does a bird of night that cannot fly from the gentle operation of its beams.

"May the following *illustration* dart at least one luminous beam into the profound darkness in which your venerable Diana delights to dwell! And may it show the Christian world that we do not '*slander you*,' when we assert, you inadvertently *destroy God's law*, and cast the Redeemer's *crown to the ground*: and that when you say, '*In point of justification*' (and consequently of condemnation) '*we have nothing to do with the law: we are under the law as a rule of life*,' but not as a rule of judgment, you might as well say, 'We are under no law, and consequently no longer accountable for our actions.'

"The King, whom I *suppose* in love with your doctrines of free grace and free wrath, by the advice of a predestinarian council and parliament, issues out a *Gospel* proclamation, directed, 'To all his dear subjects, and *elect* people, the *English*.' By this evangelical manifesto they are informed, 'That in consideration of the Prince of Wales's meritorious intercession, and perfect obedience to the laws of England, all the penalties annexed to the breaking of those laws are now abolished with respect to *Englishmen*: That His Majesty freely pardons all his subjects, who have been, are, or shall be guilty of adultery, murder, or treason: That all their crimes, "past, present, and to come, are for ever and for ever cancelled:"' That, nevertheless, his loving subjects, who remain strangers to their privileges, shall still be served with sham warrants according to law, and frightened out of their wits, till they have learned to plead they are *Englishmen* (*i.e.* elect): And then they shall set at defiance all legalists, that is, all those who shall dare to deal with them according to law: And that, excepting the case of the above-mentioned *false* prosecution of his chosen people, none of them shall ever be molested for the breach of any law.'

"By the same supreme authority, it is likewise enacted, that all the laws shall continue in force against foreigners, (*i.e.* reprobates) whom the King and the Prince hate with everlasting hatred, and to whom they have agreed never to show mercy: That, accordingly, they shall be prosecuted to the utmost rigour of every statute, till they are all hanged or burned out of the way: And that, supposing no personal offence can be proved against them, it shall be lawful to hang them in chains for the crime of one of their forefathers, to set forth the King's wonderful justice, display his glorious sovereignty, and make his chosen people relish the better their sweet, distinguishing privileges as *Englishmen*.

"Moreover, His Majesty, who loves order and harmony, charges his loving subjects to consider still the statutes of England, which are in force against foreigners, as very good *rules of life* for the English, which they will do *well* to follow, but BETTER to break; because every breach of those rules will *work for their good*, and *make them sing louder* the faithfulness of the King, the goodness of the Prince, and the sweetness of this Gospel proclamation.

"Again, as nothing is so displeasing to the King as *legality*, which he hates even more than extortion and whoredom; lest any of his dear people, who have acted the part of a strumpet, robber, murderer, or traitor, should, through the remains of their inbred corruption, and ridiculous *legality*, mourn too deeply for breaking some of their *rules of life*, our gracious Monarch solemnly assures them, that, though he highly disapproves of adultery and murder, yet these breaches of *rules* are not worse, in his sight, than a wandering thought in speaking to him, or a moment's dulness in his service: That robbers, therefore, and traitors, adulterers and murderers, who are free-born *Englishmen*, need not be at all uneasy about losing his royal favour; this being utterly impossible, because they always stand complete in the honesty, loyalty, chastity, and charity of the Prince.

"Moreover, because the King changes not, whatever lengths the *English* go in immorality, he will always look upon them as his *pleasant children*, his *dear people*, and men after his own heart; and that, on the other hand, whatsoever lengths foreigners go in pious morality, his gracious Majesty is determined still to consider them as *hypocrites, vessels of wrath*, and *cursed children*, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever; because he always views them completely guilty, and absolutely condemned in a certain *robe of unrighteousness*, woven thousands of years ago by one of their ancestors. This deadful *sanbenito*[1] His Majesty has thought fit to put upon them by imputation; and in it, it is his good pleasure that they should hang in adamantine chains, or burn in fire unquenchable.

"Finally, as foreigners are dangerous people, and may stir up His Majesty's subjects to rebellion, the *English* are informed that if any one of them, were he to come over from Geneva itself, shall dare to insinuate that this most gracious gospel proclamation is not according to equity, morality, and godliness, the first Englishman that meets him shall have full leave to brand him as a papist, without judge or jury, in the forehead or on the back, as he thinks best; and that, till he is farther proceeded with according to the utmost severity of the law, the chosen nation shall be informed, in the *Gospel Magazine*, to beware of him as a man who 'scatters firebrands, arrows, and deaths,' and *makes universal havoc of every* article of this sweet gospel proclamation.

"Given at Geneva, and signed by four of His Majesty's principal secretaries of state for the predestination department.

"JOHN CALVIN. THE AUTHOR OF 'P. O.'[2]
DR. CRISP. ROWLAND HILL."

---

[1] A frock, painted with flames and devils, in which heretics were burnt by the Inquisition.

[2] Richard Hill, the author of *Pietas Oxoniensis*.

To those not acquainted with the Calvinian controversy, this "illustration" may appear ungenerous and unfair; but in reality, the doctrines it burlesques had all been asserted by Calvinists, and the theological points involved in them had all been exposed and controverted by Fletcher, in his "Checks to Antinomianism." No doubt the exposure was unpleasant, but the author of the Checks was not to be blamed for this. His work was done with an aching heart in the defence of truth and righteousness.

Fletcher's twelfth Letter, addressed to Richard Hill alone, dwells altogether on the doctrine of Imputed Righteousness, which Fletcher describes as follows:—

> "Consistent Calvinists believe that if a man is elected, God absolutely imputes to him Christ's personal righteousness, *i.e.*, the perfect obedience unto death which Christ performed upon earth. This is reckoned to him for obedience and righteousness, even while he is actually disobedient, and before he has a grain of inherent righteousness. They consider this imputation, as an unconditional and eternal act of grace, by which, not only a sinner's past sins, but his crimes *present* and *to come*, be they more or be they less, be they small or be they great, are for ever and for ever covered. *He is* eternally *justified from all things*. And, therefore, under this imputation, he is perfectly righteous before God, even while he commits adultery or murder. Or, to use your own expression, whatever *lengths he runs*, whatever *depths he falls into*, '*he always stands absolved, always complete in the everlasting righteousness of the Redeemer*.'"

This, to many Calvinists of the present day, will seem to be an extravagant caricature of one of their favourite dogmas, but it must not be overlooked that a great part of Fletcher's descriptive definition is actually taken from the published writings of Richard Hill. No wonder, therefore, that Fletcher, with stinging irony, proceeds to say:—

> "In point of justification, it matters not how unrighteous a believer actually is in himself; because the robe of Christ's personal righteousness, which, at his peril, he must not attempt to patch up with any personal righteousness of his own, is more than sufficient to adorn him from head to foot; and he must be sure to appear before God in no other. In this rich garment of *finished salvation*, the greatest apostates shine brighter than angels, though they are '*in themselves black*' as the old murderer, and filthy as the brute that wallows in the mire. This 'best robe,' as it is called, is full-trimmed with such phylacteries as these,—'Once in grace, always in grace;' 'Once justified, eternally

justified;' 'Once washed, always fair, undefiled, and without spot.' And so great are the privileges of those who have it on, that they can range through all the bogs of sin, wade through all the puddles of iniquity, and roll themselves in the thickest mire of wickedness, without contracting the least spot of guilt, or speck of defilement."

Of course, Fletcher found no difficulty in demolishing such luscious and pernicious nonsense as this.

"If this doctrine is true," says he, "the Divine perfections suffer a general eclipse; one half of the Bible is erased; St. James's Epistle is made void; defiled religion justly passes for '*pure gospel;*' the Calvinian doctrine of perseverance is true; and barefaced Antinomianism is properly recommended as '*the doctrines of grace.*'"

Fletcher's last letter, also addressed to "Richard Hill, Esq." alone, deals with the doctrine of Free-will. His definition of the Methodist doctrine deserves quotation.

"We never supposed that the natural will of fallen man is free *to good*, before it is more or less touched and rectified by grace. All we assert is, that, whether a man chooses good or evil, his *will* is *free*, or it does not deserve the name of *will*. It is as far from us to think that man, unassisted by Divine grace, is sufficient to will spiritual good; as to suppose that when he wills it by grace he does not will it *freely*. And, therefore, agreeably to our Tenth Article, which you quote against us without the least reason, we steadily assert that *we have no power to do good works, without the grace of God preventing us*, not that we may have a *free* will, for this we always had in the above-mentioned sense, but *that we may have a good will;* believing that, as confirmed saints and angels have a *free* will, though they have no *evil* will, so abandoned reprobates and devils have a *free* will, though they have no *good* will."

These may appear to the cursory reader metaphysical niceties of no practical importance; but, a hundred years ago, they were considered doctrines of vital interest. The difference between Fletcher and his Calvinian friends is well stated by himself:—

"From our mutual concessions, it is evident we agree, 1. That the will is always *free;* 2. That the will of man, considered as fallen in Adam, and unassisted by the grace of God, is only *free to evil;* and, 3. That when he is *free to good*, free to choose life, he has this from redeeming grace.

"But, although we agree in those material points, the difference between us is still very considerable; for, we assert, that through the

Mediator promised to all mankind in Adam, God, by His free grace, restores to ALL *mankind* a talent of *free will to good*, by which they are put in a capacity of *choosing life or death*, that is, of acquitting themselves well or ill, at their option, in their present state of trial.

"This *you* utterly deny, maintaining that man is not in a state of probation; and that as Christ died for none but the elect, none but they can ever have any degree of saving grace, that is, *any free will to good*. Hence, you conclude that *all* the elect are in a state of *finished salvation*; and *necessarily*, *infallibly*, and *irresistibly* choose life; while *all* the reprobates are shut up in a state of *finished* damnation; and *necessarily*, *infallibly*, and *irresistibly* choose death.

"We are obliged to oppose this doctrine, because it appears to us a doctrine of *wrath*, rather than a doctrine of *grace*. If we are not mistaken, it is opposite to the general tenor of the Scriptures, injurious to all the Divine perfections, and subversive of this fundamental truth of natural and revealed religion, *God shall judge the world in righteousness*. It is calculated to strengthen the carnal security of Laodicean professors, raise horrid anxieties in the minds of doubting Christians, and give damned spirits just ground to blaspheme to all eternity. Again, it withdraws from thinking sinners and judicious saints the helps which God has given them, by multitudes of conditional promises and threatenings, designed to work upon their *hopes* and *fears*. And, while it unnecessarily stumbles men of sense and hardens infidels, it affords wicked men rational excuses to continue in their sins, and gives desperate offenders full room to charge not only Adam, but God Himself, with all their enormities."

In this piteous way did the evangelical revivalists of the last century become divided. It was a mournful scene; but, in the long run, it was over-ruled for good. Error was crushed, and truth rose triumphant. Meanwhile, on one side at least, great bitterness was engendered, and lamentable epithets were used. In the hottest of the fray, however, Fletcher, the chief combatant, never lost his temper. Hence, in concluding his "Fourth Check to Antinomianism," he wrote:—

"Although we severely expose the mistakes of godly Calvinists, we sincerely love their persons, truly reverence their piety, and cordially rejoice in the success which attends their evangelical labours. And, although we cannot admit their *logic*, while they defend a bad cause with bad arguments, we should do them great injustice if we did not acknowledge that there have been, and are still among them, men eminent for good sense and good learning—men as remarkable for their skill in the art of logic, as for their deep acquaintance with the oracles of God. We thank them for their pious labours; we ask the continuance, or the renewal, of their valuable love. We invite them to our pulpits; and assure them that, if they admit us into theirs, we shall do by them as we would be done by,—avoiding to touch there, or among their own people occasionally committed to our charge, upon the points of doctrine debated between us; and reserving to ourselves the liberty of bearing our full testimony in our own pulpits, and from the press, against Antinomianism and Pharisaism in all their shapes."

There were other combatants in the field whose power over themselves was not so great and so praiseworthy. Walter Sellon was one of them, to whom Richard Hill addressed the following, hitherto unpublished, letter, just about the time when the Fourth Check of Fletcher first appeared:—

"HAWKSTONE, *December* 24, 1772.

"DEAR SIR,—It will answer no end for you and me to continue our disputes, except that of stirring up the old man in us both. I believe you have the grace of God, and I am sure you are blest with a good understanding, which is well cultivated by acquired knowledge. With these endowments and qualifications, I trust it will please God to make you abundantly useful in the cause of Christ. I heartily forgive whatever has savoured more of Walter Sellon than of Jesus Christ in your two letters to me; and I beg the same on behalf of poor Richard Hill. Come, my dear Sir, let us pray for each other. If ever I have the pleasure of seeing you in the flesh, be assured that I shall embrace you in the bonds of brotherly love; if not, I trust we shall one day meet in a better place, where there will be no other contention between us than who shall sing loudest, 'Grace, grace unto it!' Without undervaluing myself in any respect, this will certainly be the privilege of that amazing monument of mercy who desires always to subscribe himself,

"Very dear Sir, your sincere and affectionate friend, in the best of bonds,
RICHARD HILL."

"To the Rev. Mr. Sellon,
Ledsham, near Ferry Bridge,
Yorkshire."

This polemical chapter cannot be more fitly concluded than with these breathings of Christian love, to which may be added an extract from a letter which Fletcher wrote to Mr. Charles Perronet, who was suffering great affliction of body and mind:—

"1772, September 7.—MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—No cross, no crown; the heavier the cross, the brighter the crown.

"'O for a firm and lasting faith,
To credit all the Almighty saith!'

"Faith, I mean the *evidence of things not seen*, is a powerful cordial to support and exhilarate us under the heaviest pressures of pain and temptation. By faith, we live upon the *invisible*, *eternal* God; we believe that *in Him* we live, move, and have our being; insensibly we slide from *self* into *God*, from the visible into the invisible, from the carnal into the spiritual, from time into eternity. Here our spirits are ever young; they live in and upon the very fountain of strength, sprightliness, and joy. Oh! my dear friend, let us rest more upon the *truth as it is in Jesus*. Of late, I have been brought to feed more upon Jesus as *the truth*. I see more in Him in that character than I ever did. I see Christ *the truth* of my life, friends, relations, sense, food, raiment, light, fire, resting-place. All out of Him are but shadows. All *in Him* are blessed sacraments; I mean visible signs of the fountain, or vehicles to convey the streams of inward grace."[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

CHAPTER XII.

APPEAL TO MATTER OF FACT AND COMMON SENSE."

1772.

THE present chapter is a somewhat inconvenient break in the history of the Calvinian controversy; but in maintaining chronological order, the inconvenience cannot be avoided.

Fletcher's "Fourth Check to Antinomianism" was finished on November 15, 1772, and was published before the year was terminated. On a fly-leaf at the end of the *first* edition the following advertisement was printed :—

> "In a few days will be published, price two shillings, by the same author, 'An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense; Or, A Rational Demonstration of Man's corrupt and lost Estate.'"

In some respects, this is Fletcher's ablest publication, and certainly it has been his most popular. A "second edition, revised and enlarged," was printed a few months after the first, and, since then, it has been scores of times re-issued. As early as the year 1804, Joseph Benson, Fletcher's biographer, remarked concerning it, "I hardly know a treatise that has been so universally read, or made so eminently useful." Even the *Monthly Review* had nought to say against it. In the number for March, 1773, the editor's notice of it was the following :—

> "Although we cannot subscribe to all Mr. Fletcher's religious opinions, we think there are abundance of good things in his writings; and we have no doubt that he is warmly animated by a sincere and pious regard for the salvation of the souls that are committed to his charge, as well as for the spiritual welfare of mankind in general."

It is worthy of remark that besides being vended at Wesley's Foundery in London, the first edition was also "sold at the *workhouse* in Madeley Wood, Shropshire, *for the benefit of the poor*." When the second edition was published, the *workhouse*, for some unknown reason, was not advertised. Probably parochial officials had interdicted the sale.

Fletcher seems to have spent more time upon his "Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense" than he did upon any of his "Checks to Antinomianism." Joseph Benson saw it in manuscript, and read most of it, a year before its publication. Fletcher took it to Bristol and left it there; but, before it was committed to the press, he requested that it might be returned to him at Madeley, to be further revised and improved. For many weeks, the manuscript was unheard of, "but," says Benson, "he was quite easy under the apprehended loss, which certainly would not have been a small one, as any person will judge who considers how much thought and time such a work must have cost him. It was found, however, by-and-by, had the finishing hand put to it, and was published to the conviction and edification of thousands." [1]

Fletcher's dedication of his book, highly characteristic, and embodying biographical facts, deserves attention.

"To the principal inhabitants of the parish of Madeley, in the county of Salop.

"GENTLEMEN,—You are no less entitled to my private labours than the inferior class of my parishioners. As you do not choose to partake with them of my evening instructions, I take the liberty to present you with some of my morning meditations. May these well-meant endeavours of my pen be more acceptable to you than those of my tongue! And may you carefully read in your closets what you have perhaps inattentively heard in the church! I appeal to the Searcher of hearts that I had rather impart truths than receive tithes. You kindly bestow the latter upon me; grant me, I pray, the satisfaction of seeing you favourably receive the former, from, gentlemen, your affectionate minister and obedient servant,

"Madeley, 1772. "J. FLETCHER."

Fletcher's principal tithe payers would not attend his vening services, and yet he was more anxious to teach them

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"the truth as it is in Jesus," than to receive their pelf. He loved their souls, though they were too high and mighty—that is, too worldly and ignorant—to appreciate his ministry.

Fletcher rightly regarded the doctrine which he irrefutably establishes as of the highest importance. By large numbers of men, who considered themselves good Christians, it was treated with indifference, and in many instances it was flatly denied. With the exception of his "Notes on the Old and New Testaments," the largest as well as the ablest book Wesley ever wrote was on the same subject. His "Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience," was first published in 1757; and now, fifteen years later, his friend Fletcher, doubtless with his approval, used his great talents to the utmost in defending the same dogma. In both books, to some extent, the same line of argumentation is followed; but, of course, Fletcher's style is very different from that of Wesley. Both of them insisted that the doctrine is essential to the Christian religion, and that if it is not true, the Christian religion is not needed. In his preface Wesley wrote:—

> "If we take away this foundation, that man is by nature foolish and sinful, 'fallen short of the glorious image of God,' the Christian system falls at once; nor will it deserve so honourable an appellation as that of a 'cunningly devised fable.'"

Fletcher began his book with the same assertion. His first paragraph is as follows:—

> "In every religion, there is a principal truth or error, which, like the first link of a chain, necessarily draws after it all the parts with which it is essentially connected. This leading principle in Christianity, distinguished from Deism, is the doctrine of our corrupt and lost estate; for if man is not *at variance* with his Creator, what need of a *Mediator* between God and him? If he is not a *depraved*, *undone* creature, what necessity of so wonderful a *Restorer* and *Saviour* as the Son of God? If he is not *enslaved* to sin, why is he *redeemed* by Jesus Christ? If he is not *polluted*, why must he be *washed in the blood of* that immaculate *Lamb?* If his soul is not *disordered*, what occasion is there for such a divine *Physician?* If he is not *helpless* and *miserable*, why is he perpetually invited to secure the *assistance* and *consolations* of the Holy Spirit? And, in a word, if he is not *born in sin*, why is a *new*

> *birth* so absolutely necessary, that Christ declares, with the most solemn asseverations, *without it no man can see the kingdom of God?*
>
> "This doctrine then being of such importance that genuine Christianity stands or falls with it, it may be proper to state it at large; and as this cannot be done in stronger and plainer words than those of the sacred writers and our pious Reformers, I beg leave to collect them and present the reader with a picture of our natural estate, drawn at full length by those ancient and masterly hands."

Fletcher proceeds to do this, and with irrefutable arguments establishes his doctrine; but in this part of his work there is no need to follow him. Indeed, his summary of Scripture proofs and his quotations from the Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy of the Church of England, do not fill more than about a dozen pages. His "second part" he begins as follows:—

> "As no man is bound to believe what is contrary to common sense, if the above-stated doctrine appears irrational, Scriptures, Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy are quoted in vain. When men of parts are pressed with their authority, they start from it as an imposition on their reason, and make as honourable a retreat as they possibly can.
>
> "Some, to extricate themselves at once, set the Bible aside as full of incredible assertions. Others, with more modesty, plead that the Scriptures have been frequently misunderstood, and are so in the present case. They put grammar, criticism, and common sense to the rack, to show that when the inspired writers say the human *heart is desperately wicked,* they mean that it is extremely good; or at least like blank paper, ready to receive either the characters of virtue or of vice. With respect to the testimony of our Reformers, they would have you to understand that in this enlightened age we must leave their harsh, uncharitable sentiments to the old Puritans and the present Methodists.
>
> "That such objectors may subscribe as a solemn truth what they have hitherto rejected as a dangerous error, and that humbled sinners may see the propriety of a heart-felt repentance, and the absolute need of an Almighty Redeemer, they are here presented with some proofs of our depravity, taken from the astonishing severity of God's dispensations towards mankind."

Limited space renders it impossible to give an outline of Fletcher's thirty-six arguments, all founded upon the following axiom:—

> "If we consider the Supreme Being as creating a world for the manifestation of His glory, the display of His perfections, and the communication of His happiness to an intelligent creature, whom He would

attach to Himself by the strongest ties of gratitude and love, we at once perceive that He never could form this earth and man in their present disordered, deplorable condition."

An extract from the ninth argument will not be out of place, furnishing, as it does, a doleful picture of a large number of Fletcher's parishioners—the colliers, the bargemen, and the iron-workers.

"To go no farther than this populous parish; with what hardships and dangers do our indigent neighbours earn their bread! See those who ransack the bowels of the earth to get the black mineral we burn; how little is their lot preferable to the Spanish felons who work the golden mines?

"They take their leave of the light of the sun, and, suspended by a rope, are let down many fathoms perpendicularly towards the centre of the globe; they traverse the rocks through which they have dug their horizontal ways. The murderer's cell is a palace in comparison of the black spot to which they repair; the vagrant's posture in the stocks is preferable to that in which they labour.

"Form, if you can, an idea of the misery of men kneeling, stooping, or lying on one side, to toil all day in a confined place, where a child could hardly stand; whilst a younger company, with their hands and feet on the black dusty ground, and a chain about their body, creep, and drag along, like four-footed beasts, heavy loads of the dirty mineral, through ways almost impassable to the curious observer.

"In these low and dreary vaults, all the elements seem combined against them. Destructive damps, and clouds of noxious dust, infect the air they breathe. Sometimes water incessantly distils on their naked bodies; or, bursting upon them in streams, drowns them, and deluges their work. At other times, pieces of detached rocks crush them to death; or the earth, breaking in upon them, buries them alive. And frequently sulphureous vapours, kindled in an instant by the light of their candles, form subterraneous thunder and lightning. What a dreadful phenomenon! How impetuous is the blast! How fierce the rolling flames! How intolerable the noisome smell! How dreadful the continued roar! How violent and fatal the explosion!

"Wonderful providence! Some of the unhappy men have time to prostrate themselves; the fiery scourge grazes their backs; the ground shields their breasts; they escape. See them wound up out of the blazing dungeon, and say if *these are not brands plucked out of the fire.* A pestiferous steam and clouds of suffocating smoke pursue them. Half dead themselves, they hold their dead or dying companions in their trembling arms. Merciful God of Shadrach! Kind Protector of Meshach! Mighty Deliverer of Abednego! Patient Preserver of rebellious Jonah! Will not *these* utter a song—a song of praise t Thee? praise ardent as the flames they escape—lasting as the life Thou prolongest? Alas, they refuse! And some—O tell it not among th heathens, lest they for ever abhor the name of *Christian*—some return to the very pits where they have been branded with sulphureous fire by the warning hand of Providence, and there, sporting themselves again with the most infernal wishes, call aloud for a fire that cannot be quenched, and challenge the Almighty to cast them into hell, that bottomless pit whence there is no return.

"Leave these black men at their perilous work, and see yonder bargemen haling that loaded vessel against wind and stream. Since the dawn of day, they have wrestled with the impetuous current; and now that it almost overpowers them, how do they exert all their remaining strength, and strain their every nerve? How are they bathed in sweat and rain? Fastened to their lines as horses to their traces, wherein do they differ from the laborious brutes? Not in an erect posture of the body, for, in the intenseness of their toil, they bend forward, their head is foremost, and their hands upon the ground. If there is any difference, it consists in this: horses are indulged with a collar to save their breasts; and these, as if theirs were not worth saving, draw without one; the beasts tug in patient silence and mutual harmony; but the men with loud contention and horrible imprecations. O sin, what hast thou done? Is it not enough that these drudges should toil like brutes? must they also curse one another like devils?

"If you have gone beyond the hearing of their impious oaths, stop to consider the sons of Vulcan confined to these forges and furnaces. Is their lot much preferable? A sultry air and clouds of smoke and dust are the elements in which they labour. The confused noise of water falling, steam hissing, fire-engines working, wheels turning, files creaking, hammers beating, ore bursting, and bellows roaring, form the dismal concert that strikes the ears; while a continual eruption of flames, ascending from the mouth of their artificial volcanoes, dazzle their eyes with a horrible glare. Massy bars of hot iron are the heavy tools they handle, cylinders of the first magnitude the enormous weights they heave, vessels full of melted metal the dangerous loads they carry, streams of the same burning fluid the fiery rivers which they conduct into the deep cavities of their subterraneous moulds, and millions of flying sparks with a thousand drops of liquid, hissing iron, the horrible showers to which they are exposed. See them cast: you would think them in a bath and not in a furnace; they bedew the burning sand with their streaming sweat; nor are their wet garments dried up, either by the fierce fires they attend, or the fiery streams which they manage. Certainly, of all men, these have best reason to remember the just sentence of an offended God: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread all the days of thy life.'"

This long extract is given, not as a specimen of Fletcher's style of writing, for it is hardly that, but as a truthful description of a large number of the poor creatures of whom he had the pastoral oversight. Many a passage of the highest kind of eloquence might be cited; but the reader is recommended to buy and peruse the book himself. The following is presented, solely because it refers to growing evils, alarmingly prevalent among people who think themselves religious:—

"But all are not employed in sin and wickedness, for many go through a constant round of *innocent diversions;* and these, at least, must be *innocent* and *happy*. Let us then consider the amusements of mankind, and see how far *our own* pleasures demonstrate our *innocence* and *happiness*.

"How excessively foolish are the plays of children! How full of mischief and cruelty the sports of boys! How vain, foppish, and frothy the joys of young people! And how much below the dignity of upright, pure creatures, the snares that persons of different sexes lay for each other! When they are together, is not this their favourite amusement, till they are deservedly caught in the net which they imprudently spread? But see them asunder.

"Here a circle of idle women, supping a decoction of Indian herbs, talk or laugh all together, like so many chirping birds, or chattering monkeys, and, scandal excepted, every way to as good a purpose. And there, a club of graver men blow, by the hour, clouds of stinking smoke out of their mouths, or wash it down their throats with repeated draughts of intoxicating liquors. The strong fumes have already reached their heads, and, while some stagger home, others triumphantly keep the field of excess; though one is already stamped with the heaviness of the ox, another worked up to the fierceness and roar of the lion, and a third brought down to the filthiness of the vomiting dog.

"Leave them at their *manly* sport, to follow those musical sounds, mixed with a noise of stamping, and you will find others profusely perspiring, and violently fatiguing themselves, in skipping up and down a room for a whole night, and ridiculously turning their backs and faces to each other a hundred different ways. Would not a man of sense prefer running ten miles upon an *useful* errand, to this useless manner of losing his rest, heating his blood, exhausting his spirits, unfitting himself for the duties of the following day, and laying the foundation of a putrid fever or a consumption, by breathing the midnight air corrupted by clouds of dust, by the unwholesome fumes of candles, and by the more pernicious steam that issues from the bodies of many persons, who use the strong exercise in a confined place.

"In the next room they are more quiet, but are they more rationally employed? Why do they so earnestly rattle those ivory cubes; and so anxiously study those packs of loose and spotted leaves? Is happiness graven upon the one, or stamped upon the other? Answer, ye gamesters, who curse your stars, as ye go home with an empty purse and a heart full of rage.

"'We hope there is no harm in taking an innocent game at cards,' reply a ridiculous party of superannuated ladies; 'gain is not our aim;

we only play to kill time.' You are not then so well employed as the foolish heathen emperor, who amused himself in killing troublesome flies and wearisome time together. The delight of rational creatures, much more of Christians on the brink of the grave, is to redeem, improve, and solidly enjoy time; but yours, alas! consists in the bare irreparable *loss* of that invaluable treasure. Oh! what account will you give of the souls you neglect, and the talents you bury?

"And are *public* diversions better evidence of our innocence and happiness?"

Fletcher then proceeds to descant, in the same style, on theatrical performances, annual wakes, horse-racing, cock-fighting, man-fighting, and dog-fighting; and then concludes his "Twenty-third Argument," as follows:—

"These are thy favourite amusements, O England, thou centre of the civilized world, where reformed Christianity, deep-thinking wisdom, and polite learning, with all its refinements, have fixed their abode! But, in the name of common sense, how can we clear them from the imputation of absurdity, folly, and madness? And by what means can they be reconciled, I will not say to the religion of the meek Jesus, but to the philosophy of a Plato, or the calm reason of any thinking man? How perverted must be the taste, how irrational and cruel the diversions of barbarians, in other parts of the globe! And how applicable to all the wise man's observation: 'Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, and madness in the breasts of the sons of men!'"

Further extensive extracts from Fletcher's invaluable book need not be given here. What he calls his "Short Defence of the Oracles of God" cannot be perused by any candid reader without the conviction being produced that infidelity, in all its phases, is the most unreasonable theory in existence. From his thirty-six arguments,—unanswerable arguments,—he deduces ten inferences, namely:—

"1. If we are by nature in a corrupt and lost estate, the grand business of ministers is to warn us of our imminent danger. 2. If we are naturally depraved and condemned creatures, self-righteousness and pride are the most absurd and monstrous of all our sins. 3. If the corruption of mankind is universal and inveterate, no mere creature can deliver them from it. 4. If our guilt is immense, it cannot be expiated without a sacrifice of an infinite dignity. 5. If our spiritual maladies are both numerous and mortal, we cannot recover the spiritual health that we enjoyed in our first parents, but by the powerful help of our heavenly Physician, the second Adam. 6. If our nature is so completely fallen and totally helpless, that, in spiritual things, 'we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing' truly good 'as of ourselves,' it is plain we stand in absolute need of the Spirit's assistance to enable us to pray, repent, believe, love, and obey aright. 7. If we are really and truly born in sin, our regeneration cannot be a mere metaphor, or a vain ceremony, but real and positive. 8. If the fall of mankind in Adam does not consist in a capricious imputation of his personal guilt, but in a real, present participation of his depravity, impotence, and misery, the salvation that believers have in Christ is not a capricious imputation of His personal righteousness, but a real, present participation of His purity, power, and blessedness, together with pardon and acceptance. 9. If the corrupt nature, which sinners derive from Adam, spontaneously produces all the wickedness that overspreads the earth, the holy nature which believers receive from Christ is spontaneously productive of all the fruits of righteousness described in the oracles of God. 10. If corruption and sin work so powerfully and sensibly in the hearts of the unregenerate, we may, without deserving the name of enthusiasts, affirm that the regenerate are sensible of the powerful effects of Divine grace in their souls; or, to use the words of our Seventeenth Article, we may say, 'They feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of Christ.'"

When it is added that the doctrines, from which these inferences are drawn, are plainly stated, and fully proved, a good general idea of Fletcher's book will be given. His "Concluding Address to the Serious Reader, who inquires, What must I do to be saved?" has been read by myriads, and cannot be read too much. The last two paragraphs of his treatise must be quoted :—

"*This* book is chiefly recommended to disbelieving moralists, who deride the doctrine of salvation by grace *through faith* in the day of conversion, merely because they are not properly acquainted with our fallen and lost estate. And the *Checks* are chiefly designed for disbelieving Antinomians, who rise against the doctrine of a believer's salvation by grace *through the works* of faith in the great day, merely because they do not consider the indispensable necessity of evangelical obedience, and the nature of the day of judgment.

"In the *Appeal*, the careless, self-conceited sinner is awakened and humbled. In the *Address*, the serious, humbled sinner is raised up and comforted. And in the *Checks*, the foolish virgin is re-awakened, the Laodicean believer reproved, the prodigal son lashed back to his father's house, and the upright believer animated to mend his pace in the way of *faith working by love*, and to *perfect holiness in the fear of God.*"

Such is Fletcher's own accurate account of the important works he had hitherto committed to the press.

CHAPTER XIII.

WESLEYS DESIGNATED SUCCESSOR: THE PENITENT THIEF: A DREADFUL PHENOMENON, ETC., ETC.

1773.

TO preserve chronological order, another chapter must be interjected before the history of the Calvinian controversy is resumed.

In the month of January, 1773, Wesley sent to Fletcher the remarkable letter with which the present work commences. He wished Fletcher to relinquish his vicarage, and to put himself into training to become, after Wesley's death, the "ωροεστως" of the Methodists. Wesley's health, apparently, was failing. He was full of anxiety. "The body of the preachers," he wrote, "are not united: nor will any part of them submit to the rest; so that either there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end." Subsequent events proved Wesley's fears to be unfounded; but, for the time being, they were real, and disquieted him. He wished to train his successor, and to introduce him to the people. He specified what he considered to be the necessary qualifications of such a man, and regarded Fletcher as the only one of his wide acquaintance as possessing them. "Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood," said he, "come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labour of your affectionate friend and brother, John Wesley."

Fletcher's reply to Wesley's most important proposal was as follows:—

"MADELEY, *February* 6, 1773.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I hope the Lord, who has so wonderfully stood by you hitherto, will preserve you to see many of your sheep, and me among them, enter into rest. Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, by the Lord's assistance, to help your brother to gather the wreck, and keep together those who are not absolutely bent to throw away the Methodist doctrines and discipline, as soon as he that now letteth is removed out of the way. Every help will then be necessary, and I shall not be backward to throw in my mite.

"In the meantime, you sometimes need an assistant to serve tables, and occasionally to fill up a gap. Providence visibly appointed *me* to that office many years ago. And though it no less evidently called me hither, yet I have not been without doubt, especially for some years past, whether it would not be expedient that I should resume my office as your deacon; not with any view of presiding over the Methodists after you; but to ease you in your old age, and to be in the way of recovering, and, perhaps, doing more good. I have sometimes thought how shameful it was that no clergyman should join you, to keep in the Church the work God has enabled you to carry on therein. And, as the little estate I have in my own country is sufficient for my maintenance, I have thought I would, one day or other, offer you and the Methodists my free service. While my love of retirement made me linger, I was providentially led to do something in Lady Huntingdon's plan; but, being shut out there, it appears to me I am again called to my first work.

"Nevertheless, I would not leave this place, without a fuller persuasion that the time is *quite* come. Not that God uses me much here, but I have not yet sufficiently cleared my conscience from the blood of all men. Meantime, I beg the Lord to guide me by His counsel, and make me willing to go anywhere, or nowhere, to be anything, or nothing.

"Help by your prayers, till you can bless by word of mouth, Rev. and dear Sir, your willing, though unprofitable servant in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Fletcher did not decline Wesley's proposal; but he deferred coming to a decision until "the time was quite come." Whether the proposal was afterwards *formally* renewed, it is difficult to determine; but Dr. Whitehead, who, from 1764 to 1769, had been one of the itinerant preachers, and who was well acquainted with both Wesley and his friend Fletcher, remarks concerning Wesley's request:—

"This warm and sincere invitation to a situation not only respected but even reverenced by so large a body of people, must have been highly flattering to Mr. Fletcher; especially as it came from a person he most sincerely loved; whose superior abilities, learning, and labours he admired; and to whose success in the ministry he wished to give every assistance in his power. But he well knew the embarrassments Mr. Wesley met with in the government of the preachers, though he alone, under the providence of God, had given existence to their present character, influence, and usefulness. He was also well acquainted with the mutual jealousies the preachers had of each other, and with their jarring interests: and, above all, with the general determination which prevailed among them not to be under the control of any one man after the death of Mr. Wesley. Under these circumstances, he saw nothing before him but darkness, storms, and tempests, with the most threatening dangers, especially if he should live to be alone in the office. He therefore determined not to launch his little bark on so tempestuous an ocean.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," p. 66.

"I cannot, however, but lament that he did not accept Mr. Wesley's invitation, as he would have done much good while he lived, and have prevented many of the evils which have since taken place."[1]

The evils which Dr. Whitehead deprecated were the resolutions enacted by the Methodist Conferences, held after Wesley's decease, respecting the preachers being allowed to administer the sacraments to their Societies, to hold services in Methodist chapels "in church hours," and other kindred matters. Of all this, Dr. Whitehead, an able and honest man, strongly disapproved, and hence his regret that Fletcher, by declining Wesley's invitation, had not helped to, at least, postpone such serious changes.

Wesley foresaw the probability, and indeed the certainty, of such changes being made, and he also lamented Fletcher's decision. Thirteen years afterwards, in commenting upon Fletcher's letter to himself, he wrote:—

"'Providence,' says he, 'visibly appointed me to that office' [Wesley's assistant] 'many years ago.' Is it any wonder then that he should now be *in doubt* whether he did right in confining himself to one spot? The more I reflect upon it, the more I am convinced he had great reason to doubt this. I can never believe it was the will of God that such a burning and shining light should be *hid under a bushel*. No; instead of being confined to a country village, it ought to have shone in every corner of our land. He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation as Mr. Whitefield himself. Nay, abundantly more so; seeing he was far better qualified for that important work. He had a more striking person, equally good breeding, an equally winning address, together with a richer flow of fancy, a stronger understanding; a far greater treasure of learning, both in languages, philosophy, philology, and divinity; and, above all (which I can speak with fuller assurance, because I had a thorough knowledge both of one and the other), a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

---

[1] Whitehead's "Life of Wesley," vol. ii., p. 356.

"And yet let not any one imagine that I depreciate Mr. Whitefield, or undervalue the grace of God and the extraordinary gifts which his great Master vouchsafed unto him. I believe he was highly favoured of God; yea, that he was one of the most eminent ministers that has appeared in England, or perhaps in the world, during the present century. Yet I must own I have known many fully equal to Mr. Whitefield, both in holy tempers and holiness of conversation; but one equal herein to Mr. Fletcher I have not known; no, not in a life of fourscore years."[1]

No wonder that Wesley lamented the course taken by his wished-for successor; but it is rather difficult to say why Wesley should cast upon him loving blame for confining his light "to a country village." Fletcher's hands were full of literary works, by means of which he had defended, and continued to defend, the doctrines which it was the object of Wesley's life to propagate. Besides, in about a year after Wesley made his proposal, Fletcher's health began to fail, and never after that was his physical vigour such as to enable him to undertake the laborious itinerancy which Wesley contemplated and desired. Upon the whole, it is an open question whether Fletcher did not render greater service to Wesley and the Methodists by continuing his literary defence of their great and glorious doctrines than he would have done if he had accepted Wesley's invitation to go into training to become his successor.

In other ways, however, besides his writings, he rendered great assistance to his friend. It was just after the time when Wesley wrote his important letter that an incident occurred which is worth relating.

Samuel Bradburn, a soldier's son, was born at Gibraltar in 1751. At twelve years of age he was brought to England; at nineteen became a Methodist; and at twenty-one began to preach. During his residence at Gibraltar, he was sent to school at a penny a week; but, on the terms being raised to three-halfpence, his mother took him away, finding it inconvenient to be at such an expense for her son's education. This was all the schooling that he had; but he was taught to read at home, and before he was eight years old had committed the histories of Joseph and Samson to memory.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," p. 68.

On coming to England, his parents settled at Chester, and he himself was apprenticed to a shoemaker. In the week preceding Easter, in 1773, he set off to Madeley to have an interview with Fletcher, whose "Checks" he had been reading. On approaching the vicarage, he saw a man working in the garden, who, addressing the young shoemaker, said, "You see, my brother, a fulfilment of the curse, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.'" Bradburn, stating who he was, said he had not been at Madeley before, and wished to be introduced to Mr. Fletcher. "I am John Fletcher," replied the amateur gardener. Bradburn, for the moment, was embarrassed; but on saying that he had come to consult the vicar of Madeley respecting his being called to engage in the Christian ministry, Fletcher, with his characteristic generosity, led him into his house, and requested him to become his guest. The invitation was gratefully accepted, and during his stay the young shoemaker was treated with paternal kindness. Bradburn, like his host, was an early riser, and every morning was employed in finding the texts of Scripture which Fletcher wished to use in the "Check" he was then writing, and in listening to Fletcher's exposition of them. When two or three hours had thus been spent, the students went into the garden of the vicarage and had a spell at any kind of work that needed attention. After this followed the plain gruel breakfast and domestic devotion. Then several more hours were employed in the vicar's study; after which the master and the pupil set out to visit the parishioners. Every night in the week young Bradburn preached in colliers' cottages, or in the Methodist meeting-house, Fletcher standing by his side, and generally supplementing the sermon with additional remarks, delivered with delicate tenderness, and always concluded by a prayer. To the end of life, Bradburn thankfully acknowledged that he greatly owed his subsequent eminence to this Madeley visit. When he was leaving, the kind-hearted vicar said, "My little David, go! and if you preach forty years, and save only a single soul, don't think your time and labour have been lost." Bradburn always spoke of his early friend as "Saint Fletcher;" and often said, that when he looked at the vicar of Madeley he was almost ready to think the

Lord Jesus Christ stood before him in the person of His servant; and in hours of depression, when he found it difficult to pray, he was wont to sigh and cry, "God of Mr. Fletcher, bless me!"[1]

The Methodist reader need not be told that Fletcher's humble pupil rose to great eminence. Unquestionably he was the greatest pulpit orator that Wesley ever had. Dr. Adam Clarke, who knew him well, once said to a young preacher, who wished his opinion concerning Bradburn, "I have never heard his equal; I can furnish you with no adequate idea of his powers as an orator; we have not a man among us that will support anything like a comparison with him. Another Bradburn must be created, and you must hear him for yourself, before you can receive a satisfactory answer to your inquiry."

In 1817, all the sermons that Bradburn had published, whether separately or in the *Methodist Magazine*, were collected, and published in a 12mo. volume of 332 pages; but, as Dr. Abel Stevens well observes, "The eloquence of Bradburn, like that of Whitefield, could not be printed."

John Fletcher rendered no small service to John Wesley and the Methodists by his brief training of the young shoemaker in 1773.

While writing his "Checks," Fletcher seems to have been obliged to curtail his correspondence with his friends. At all events, his published letters belonging to this period are few in number. The following were written in 1773. The first was addressed to his friend Mr. Vaughan, the officer of Excise at Atcham, with whom he became acquainted while he had the charge of the sons of Mr. Hill:—

"MADELEY, *February* 11, 1773.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—At the beginning of the week I received your kind letter, and your kind present at the end of it. For both I heartily thank you. Nevertheless, I could wish it were your last present, for I find it more blessed to give than to receive; and in point of the good things of this life my body does not want much, and I can do with what is more common, and cheaper, than the rarities you ply me with.

"Your bounty upon bounty reminds me of the repeated mercies of our God. They follow one another as wave does wave at sea; and all to waft us to the pleasing shore of confidence and gratitude, where we can not only cast anchor near, but calmly stand on the Rock of Ages, and defy the rage of tempests. But you complain, you are not *there;* billows of temptation drive you from the haven where you would be, and you cry out still, '*Oh wretched man! who shall deliver me?*'

---

[1] Miss Bradburn's MSS., and MS. by Mr. Harrison, of Chester.

"Here I would ask, Are you willing, *really willing*, to be delivered? Is your sin, is the prevalence of temptation, a burden too heavy for you to bear? If it is, if your complaint is not a kind of religious compliment, be of good cheer—only believe. Look up! for your redemption draweth near. He is near that delivers, that justifies, that sanctifies you. Cast your soul upon Him. An act of faith will help you to a lift; but *one* act of faith will not do. *Faith must be our life;* I mean *in conjunction with its grand object.* You cannot live by one breath; you must breathe on, and draw the electric, vital fire into your lungs together with the air. So you must believe, and draw the Divine power, the fire of Jesu's love, together with the truth of the Gospel, which is the blessed element in which believers live.

"My kind Christian love to Mrs. Vaughan. Tell her I am filled with joy in thinking that, though we no more serve the same earthly master,[1] yet we still serve the same heavenly one; who will, ere long, admit us to sit with Abraham himself, if we hold fast our confidence to the end.

"Beware of the world. If you have losses, be not cast down, nor root in the earth with more might and main to repair them. If prosperity smiles upon you, you are in double danger. Think, my friend, that earthly prosperity is like a coloured cloud, which passes away and is soon lost in the shades of night and death. Beware of hurry. Martha, Martha, one thing is needful! Choose it, stand to your choice, and the good part shall not be taken from you by sickness or death. God bless you and yours with all that makes for His glory and your peace.

"I am, my dear friend, yours, etc.,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

The following extracts are taken from a letter addressed to James Ireland, Esq., of Brislington, who had suggested to Fletcher the expediency of publishing in the French language his "Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense."

"MADELEY, *September* 21, 1773.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I have considered what you say about the translation of my 'Appeal;' and I think I might do it some day; nay, I tried to turn a paragraph or two the day after I received your letter, but found it would be a difficult, if not an impossible work for me.

---

[1] From this, it would appear that Mrs. Vaughan, previous to her marriage, had been in the employ of Mr. Hill, of Tern Hall.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 216.

I am sure I could not do it abroad. On a journey, I am just like a cask of wine—I am good for nothing till I have some time to settle.

"What you say about Mr. Wesley adds weight to your kind arguments. My spiritual circumstances are what I must look at. I tremble lest outward things should hurt me. The multiplicity of objects and avocations, which attend travelling, is not suited to my case. I think, all things considered, I should sin against my conscience in going, unless I had a call from *necessity*, or from *clearer* providences.

"My last 'Check' will be as much in behalf of free grace as of holiness; so I hope, upon that plan, all the candid and moderate will be able to shake hands. It will be of a reconciling nature; and I call it an 'Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism.'

"I see life so short, and time passes away with such rapidity, that I should be very glad to spend it in solemn prayer; but it is necessary that a man should have some exterior occupation. The chief thing is to employ ourselves profitably. My throat is not formed for the labours of preaching. When I have preached three or four times together, it inflames and fills up; and the efforts, which I am then obliged to make, heat my blood. Thus, I am, by nature, as well as by the circumstances I am in, obliged to employ my time in writing a little. O that I may be enabled to do it to the glory of God!

"Let us love this good God, who hath 'so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.' How sweet is it, on our knees, to receive this Jesus, this heavenly gift, and to offer our praises and thanks to our heavenly Father! The Lord teaches me four lessons; the first is to be thankful that I am not in hell; the second, to become *nothing* before Him; the third, to *receive* the gift of God; and the fourth is to feel my want of the *Spirit* of Jesus, and to wait for it. These four lessons are very deep. O when shall I have learned them! Let us go together to the school of Jesus, and learn to be meek and lowly in heart. Adieu!

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The above is the first time that Fletcher complains of his throat. This affection, in itself, apart from the other reason he mentions, was quite sufficient to justify his hesitancy in complying with Wesley's request to devote himself to the itinerancy, and to train himself to become Wesley's successor.

Before returning to the Calvinian controversy, two other incidents, belonging to the year 1773, must be mentioned.

"John Wilkes," says Fletcher, "was born at Darlaston. His father dying when he was a child, his mother bound him an apprentice to a collier, who delighted in cock-fighting, and who was killed by a quantity of coals falling upon him in the pit. The collier's widow, being unable to manage Wilkes, released him from his apprenticeship for a trifling sum of money. He began to steal fowls, that he might have the pleasure of fighting those that would fight, and eating those that would not. Two or three years ago he was committed to Stafford jail, and soon after publicly whipped for that offence. From breaking into hen-roosts, he proceeded to break into and to rob the dwelling-house of a widow at Darlaston; and, going upon the highway, he robbed a man of his watch and some money. He was taken, and recommitted to Stafford jail. He took his trial at the last assizes; and, being found guilty of the above-mentioned robberies, received sentence of death, with another young man, who had set fire to some barns, and a stack of hay."

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 218.

John Wilkes' eldest sister was Fletcher's servant, and to her the convict wrote the following:—

"STAFFORD JAIL, *March* 17, 1773.

"This informs you of my being a convict under sentence of death. I beg you will endeavour to prevail on Mr. Fletcher to grant me his interest for a reprieve, by getting me recommended to his majesty's mercy. And I tenderly beg you will come over and see me here in a few days, who am your poor unfortunate brother,

"JOHN WILKES."

Fletcher declined to interfere, but wrote a long letter to the convict, dated "Madeley, *March* 23, 1773." He says:—

"JOHN WILKES,—Your sister desiring me to make application to some person in power, to get you reprieved for transportation, I take this first opportunity of informing you that I was once concerned in saving a young man from the gallows, because he was condemned for his first offence, which was robbing his master of money, and that I had no thanks, but many upbraidings for my pains; the poor creature having turned out very bad, done much mischief before he left England, and being spared, I fear, only to hurt his fellow-creatures, and fill up the measure of his iniquities.

"Besides, you know, John, that your crimes are of the most capital nature. You are not only a housebreaker, but a highwayman, and a very notorious offender. You know you have committed crimes enough to hang two or three men, perhaps half-a-dozen. And so far as I can gather from a variety of circumstances, you are the very person that broke open my house over the way, and robbed the poor widow who lives in it. If you committed that robbery, I desire you to confess it before you leave this world; for 'he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall obtain mercy;' while he that tells lies to conceal them, pulls down double vengeance upon his guilty head.

"But whether you committed that robbery or not, I earnestly desire that you will submit to your sentence. I neither can nor will meddle in that affair; nor have I any probability of success if I did. Appl then yourself, night and day, to the King of heaven for grace and mercy. If you cry to Him from the bottom of your heart, as a condemned dying man, who deserves hell as well as the gallows; if you sincerely confess your crimes, and beg the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, to intercede for you, it is not too late to get your soul reprieved. He will speak for you to God Almighty; He will pardon all your sins; He will wash you in His most precious blood; He will stand by you in your extremity; He will deliver you out of the hands of the hellish executioner; and, though you have lived the life of the wicked, He will help you to die the death of the penitent. He can feel for poor condemned thieves; for He himself was condemned to be hanged on a tree; not indeed for His own sins, for He never transgressed, but for your crimes and mine."

"On Saturday, March 27," continues Fletcher in his narrative, "I gave a few lines for the keeper of Stafford jail, to Sarah Wilkes, the malefactor's sister, and to Elizabeth Childs, a serious woman, whom she had got to bear her company; and, when I had recommended in prayer the condemned criminals to the Redeemer's compassion, and their feeble visitors to the protection of Him Who can give wisdom to the simple, they set out to see John Wilkes, and administer some spiritual comfort to him before he launched into eternity."

The poor women met with a rough reception at Stafford prison. The jailer, a fair specimen of officials in other prisons, at that period, said, "What do you want with John Wilkes? to preach him a sermon, and sing psalms? I know very well what you are, a parcel of canting hypocrites."

Sarah Wilkes and Elizabeth Childs showed themselves to be apt pupils of the Vicar of Madeley. In the Journal of their nine days' visit they wrote:—

"We were much discouraged at the jailer's behaviour. So we agreed to lay the matter before God in prayer, and beg of Him that He would touch the jailer's heart, and cause him to let us in. The next morning, which was Sunday, after begging hard for grace, wisdom, and courage, we went to the prison; and, to our great surprise, the turnkey opened the door, and, without speaking a word, took us straight to the condemned men, and let us be with them as long as we thought proper; a liberty which we were allowed twice a day till they suffered."

John Wilkes confessed to the two women that he had robbed the house at Madeley, in which the poor widow lived. He became a penitent. The nine days' Journal of his sister and Elizabeth Childs concludes thus:—

"Saturday, April 3, the day of his execution, John Wilkes was exceeding happy, and employed in breathing out prayers and praises to

God. In the morning, we spent about two hours with him and his fellow-prisoner, praying and praising together in their dungeon, with much brokenness of heart, and many tears of joy and sorrow; for we were both persuaded that John Wilkes had saving faith, and an unshaken well-grounded confidence that God would take him to glory.

"About two hours before the execution, which was between four and five in the afternoon, his sister asked, 'Dost thou find thyself happy in the Lord?' To which he answered, 'Yes, I do, I do, more and more.'

"When they were come to the place of execution, John Wilkes's companion desired the spectators, especially young people, to take warning by them; which was the more affecting, as he was supposed to be only about twenty years old, and John Wilkes was not above nineteen. They sang and prayed some time under the gallows; and the last words John Wilkes was heard to speak were, 'Lord, from this place receive me into Thy heavenly kingdom!'"

Some will condemn Fletcher's action, or rather inaction, in the case of John Wilkes; but, a hundred years ago, public opinion respecting crimes, criminals, and criminal punishment was widely different from the public opinion of the present day. It certainly seems to be a savage thing to hang a youth of nineteen years of age for thieving; but the law of the land authorized this; and Fletcher evidently had but little hope of any good arising from reprievement in a case like that of Wilkes. Perhaps he was right, or perhaps he was wrong. At all events, Wilkes became a penitent thief, and, as such, his sister and his sister's master had reason to rejoice and to give thanks. Fletcher immediately published a pamphlet on the occasion with the title, "The Penitent Thief; or, a Narrative of Two Women, fearing God, who Visited in Prison a Highwayman, executed at Stafford, April 3, 1773. With a Letter to a Condemned Malefactor. And a Penitential Office, for either a true Churchman, or a dying Criminal, extracted from the Scriptures and the Established Liturgy."

Nothing more need be said, except that the "Penitential Office" was compiled "entirely from the Scriptures and the Liturgy of the Church of England;" that it was suitable for either a living sinner or a dying thief; and that, to excite, exercise, and increase his own repentance, Fletcher himself was accustomed to use it in his private devotions.

A few weeks after the execution of John Wilkes another event occurred, which must be noticed. The following is taken from *Lloyd's Evening Post*, of June 11, 1773:—

"An authentic account of the earthquake at the Birches, about a mile above the bottom of Coalbrookdale, Shropshire.

"In the dead of the night, between Tuesday the 25th and Wednesday the 26th ult., Samuel Wilcocks's wife, who lived in a small house at the Birches, was sitting up in bed, to take care of one of her children, who was ill, when she perceived the bed shake under her, and observed some balm tea in a cup to be so agitated that it was spilled.

"On Thursday morning, the 27th, Samuel Wilcocks and John Roberts (who likewise lived in the house at the Birches) got up about four o'clock, and, opening their window to see what the weather was, observed a crack in the ground four or five inches wide, and a field sown with oats heaving and rolling like waves of water. The trees moved as if blown with wind, though the air was calm and serene. The Severn (in which at that time was a considerable flood) was much agitated, and seemed to run upwards. The house shook; and, in a great fright, Wilcocks and Roberts roused the rest of the family, and ran out of doors. Immediately, about thirty acres of land, with the hedges and trees standing, moved with great force and swiftness towards the Severn. Near the river was a small wood, in which grew twenty large oaks. The wood was pushed with such velocity into the channel of the Severn, that it drove the bed of the river on the opposite shore many feet above the surface of the water, where it lodged, as did one side of the wood. The current of the river was instantly stopped. This occasioned a great inundation above, and so sudden a fall below, that many fish were left on dry land. The river took its course over a large meadow, and in three days wore a navigable channel. A turnpike road was moved more than thirty yards. A barn was carried about the same distance, and was left as a heap of rubbish in a large chasm. The house" (in which Wilcocks lived) "received but little damage; but the garden hedge was removed about fifty yards. Several long and deep chasms are formed in the upper part of the land from fourteen to upwards of thirty yards wide, in which are many pyramids of earth standing, with the green turf remaining on the tops of some of them. The land on both sides the river is the property of Walter Acton Moseley, Esq., who, we hear, has sustained a damage of six or seven hundred pounds.

"On Friday, the 28th, the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, preached a sermon upon the ground, to an audience of more than one thousand people. In a most pathetic discourse, he expatiated on the works of Divine Providence; recommended his hearers to prepare for the last great and awful day; and expressed the hope that the present dreadful scene would prove a sufficient warning to them.

"T. ADDENBROOKE.

"*Coalbrooke Dale,*
June 4, 1773."

So long an extract from a newspaper would hardly have been proper in a "Life of Fletcher," but for the fact that Fletcher himself immediately published a bulky pamphlet of 104 pages, on the same event. Its long title was the following: "A Dreadful Phenomenon described and improved. Being a Particular Account of the Sudden Stoppage of the River Severn, and of the Terrible Desolation that happened at the Birches, between Coalbrook Dale and Buildwas Bridge, in Shropshire, on Thursday morning, May 27, 1773. And the Substance of a Sermon, preached the next day, on the ruins, to a vast concourse of spectators. By John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, in Shropshire, and Chaplain to the Right Hon. the Earl of Buchan. Shrewsbury, 1773. Price, One Shilling."

Thirty-three pages of Fletcher's publication are filled with a description of the "Dreadful Phenomenon." This is dated "Madeley, July 6, 1773." No useful purpose would be served by quoting Fletcher's account of what he heard and saw; but the following extract will show how he was led to preach his sermon:—

"Should the reader desire to know why I preached upon the ruins, I will ingenuously tell him. The day the earth opened at the Birches, as I considered one of the chasms, several of my parishioners gathered around me. I observed to them, that, the sight before us was a remarkable confirmation of the first argument of a book called, 'An Appeal to Matter of Fact, or a Rational Demonstration of Man's Fallen and Lost Estate,' which I had just published, as a last effort to awaken to a sense of the fear of God the careless gentlemen of my parish, to whom it is dedicated. Having a few copies about me, which I was going to present to some of them, I begged leave to read that argument.

"I concluded my reading and remarks by thanksgiving and prayer; and, perceiving that seriousness sat upon all faces, I told the people, that, if they would come again the next evening to the same place, I would endeavour to improve the loud call to repentance, which God had given us that day.

"They readily consented; and when I came, at the time appointed, to my great surprise, I found a vast concourse of people, and among them several of my parishioners, who had never been at church in all their life. After a prayer and thanksgiving suitable to the uncommon circumstances, I preached a sermon, of which, so far as I can recollect, the reader may find the substance, with some additions, in the following pages. May it have a better effect upon him than it had upon some of the gentlemen who heard it! Instead of a prayer-book, they pulled out their favourite companion, a bottle; and imparted the strong contents to each other, as heartily as I did the awful contents of my text to the *decent* part of the congregation. Gentle reader, receive them as cordially as they did their stupifying antidote, and I ask no more."

This, certainly, was a disgraceful scene, but not so disgraceful as that which occurred a few days afterwards, and which Fletcher, in a foot-note, relates. Among the many thousands, who came to view the results of the earthquake, were a company from Bridgnorth, headed by a young clergyman, who "brought music along with them, and set a-dancing upon the very place where the awful earthquake had happened."

The text of Fletcher's almost impromptu sermon was Numb. xvi. 30—34. The sermon itself occupies seventy pages. Addressing the irreverent "gentlemen" before him, the bold preacher cried :—

> "O ye Christian Dathans, ye lofty Abirams, ye, who, like those proud Israelites, are in your respective parishes '*princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown*,' the eyes of this populous neighbourhood are upon you, especially the eyes of poor illiterate colliers, waggoners, and watermen. Do you not consider that they mind your *examples*, rather than God's precepts? Are you not aware that they follow you as a bleating flock follows the first wandering sheep? Because they cannot read the sacred pages, or even tell the first letters of the alphabet, think you they cannot read *secret contempt of Almighty God* on the sleeves, in which they sometimes see you laugh at godliness? And suppose ye, they cannot make out *open pollution of His Sabbaths* when they see the remarkable seats, which you so frequently leave empty at church? Do you not know that the lessons of practical atheism, which you thus give them in the free school of bad example, they learn without delay, practise without remorse, and teach others with unwearied diligence? Alas! the pattern of indevotion, which you set in the house of God, carries, before you are aware, its baneful influence through a hundred private houses. Oh! how many are now numbered among the dead, who have taken to the ways of destruction by following *you!* How many are yet unborn, upon whom a curse will be entailed, in consequence of the spreading plague of irreligion, which their parents have caught from *you!* And shall not their blood be, more or less, required at your hands? 'Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?'"

This was fearless speaking, and not likely to increase Fletcher's popularity among his rich, dissolute parishioners. The following extract is struck upon another key :—

"Although we cannot all '*sing the song of the Lamb*,' yet, glory be to God! we all consider the patience of our offended Creator, who, upon these ruins, invites us to repent and live. The earth, in the days of Moses, opened her mouth, and dreadfully swallowed up two families. The earth yesterday opened her mouth, probably far wider, and yet the only two families that lived here were suffered to make their escape. Allelujah! Praise the Lord! Multitudes of fishes have perished on dry ground, and myriads of land insects in the waters; and yet we, sinful insects before God, have neither been drowned in yesterday's flood, nor buried in these chasms: Allelujah! God's tremendous axe has been lifted up; some of yonder green trees have been struck; and we, who are dry trees, we, cumberers of the ground, are graciously spared; Allelujah! The house of Dathan and Abiram, with all that appertained unto them, descended into the pit of destruction; and we, who are loaded with mountains of sins, stand yet upon firm ground, with all our friends. Allelujah! God, who might have commanded the earth to swallow up a thronged play-house, the royal exchange, a crowded cathedral, the parliament house, or the king's palace, has graciously commanded an empty barn to sink, and give us the alarm. Allelujah! He might have ordered such a tract of land as this, to heave, move, and open in the centre of our populous cities; but mercy has inclined Him to fix upon this solitary place. Allelujah! He might have suffered the road and the river to be overthrown, when cursing drivers passed with their horses, and blaspheming watermen with their barges; but His compassion made Him strike the warning blow with all possible tenderness. 'O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He does for the children of men!'"

These two extracts from the sermon preached on this remarkable occasion must suffice; but one of Fletcher's foot-notes may be added:—

"A woman, thirty-five years of age, passing before a looking-glass the day after she heard this sermon, was surprised to see an unusual paleness upon her face. She called her husband, told him she was a dying woman, and actually died in a quarter of an hour. She heard me on the Friday, and I buried her the Monday following. Another middle-aged person, who was also among my hearers, was buried the next day in the next parish. How soon may we be called to give an account of what we speak or hear, write or *read!*"

The anti-evangelical *Monthly Review* of November, 1773, in noticing Fletcher's publication, remarked:—

"Mr. Fletcher, who is a man of learning and considerable abilities, has given us a curious account of this phenomenon, which has been so frequently mentioned in our newspapers. He has minutely, but in very flowery language, described the awful appearances left by this extraordinary convulsion of the earth; and he fairly states the different opinions which were formed in regard to the cause of so wonderful an event. Mr. Fletcher tells us that he piously chose to take advantage of the seriousness stamped, by this alarming occurrence, on the minds of the country people, in order to press upon them a proper sense of the *first* or *moral* cause of so tremendous a dispensation; and this he has done in a manner as rational as could be well expected from the peculiarity of the occasion and the known enthusiastic spirit of the preacher."

CHAPTER XIV.

"*THE FINISHING STROKE*," "*THE CHRISTIAN WORLD UNMASKED*," "*MR. RICHARD HILL'S THREE LETTERS*."

1773.

AFTER this long and awkward interruption, there must now be a return to the wearisome Calvinian controversy.

Early in the year 1773, Mr. Richard Hill published an 8vo. pamphlet of 57 pages, with the title, "The Finishing Stroke: containing some Strictures on the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Pamphlet, entitled Logica Genevensis, or a Fourth Check to Antinomianism."

> "The Finishing Stroke!" remarked the *Monthly Review* for March, 1773. "No—we are afraid not! We shall certainly have *more last words* from Shropshire. Here is a fresh attack on the Vicar of Madeley. Mr. Hill does not seem at all inclined to let Mr. Fletcher remain master of the field, for want of an opponent, 'notwithstanding the resolution he had formed of being silent.'—*Vide advert.* prefixed to the 'Finishing Stroke.'"

Mr. Hill's pamphlet is dated January 2, 1773, and addressed to Fletcher. He begins by saying:—

> "Last Saturday, and not before, I received your *Logica Genevensis*, or *Fourth Check to Antinomianism;* and am truly sorry to find that neither the spirit of the piece, nor the doctrine it contains, is a jot better than what appeared in the former Checks."

Mr. Richard Hill was angrier than ever. Want of space renders it impossible to examine his theology; and to quote his calumnious accusations is unsavoury work; and yet the latter must be done, for the employment of these slanders was, at least, one of the reasons why the controversy was continued. Perhaps, Fletcher was not averse to fighting. He liked an honourable contest, especially if it was likely to repress evil, or to promote good. To do this had been his chief, almost his only object during the last two years; but now his own reputation was at stake, and he was bound to defend himself, as well as to defend the doctrines he had expounded and enforced.

"The purest treasure mortal times afford,
Is spotless reputation; that away,
Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay."

On the ninth page of his pamphlet, Richard Hill politely asks poor Fletcher, "Can you wonder, Sir, that we look upon you as a spiritual calumniator, and that we accuse you of vile falsehood and gross perversion?"

On the next page, Mr. Hill remarks:—

"I know, Sir, that it was a warm attachment to your friend, which occasioned you to run the lengths you have done. But dear as that friend is to you, truth ought to be dearer still; yet the maxim, which you seem all along to pursue, is, that Mr. Wesley *must be vindicated;* yea, though all the ministers in the kingdom, yourself not excepted, should fall to the ground. But what makes us still more sensibly feel the power of your pen is that our tenets are most shamefully (would I could say unintentionally) misrepresented, in order to prejudice the world against us, and to make them believe we hold sentiments which from our inmost souls we most cordially detest; particularly with regard to the doctrines of election and perseverance, which you have made to stand upon a pillory as high as Haman's gallows, dressed up in a frightful garb of your own invention, and then pelted them till all your mud and dirt was exhausted.

"Mr. Wesley has nothing to do but hold up his finger in order to prevent thousands of his followers from ever looking into anything that is written against his own faction, and to make them believe that the *Four Checks* (as they are called) contain the *medulla* of the Christian religion. Be this as it will, the unfair quotations you have made, and the shocking misrepresentations and calumnies you have been guilty of, will, for the future, prevent me from looking into any of your books, if you should write a thousand volumes. So here the controversy must end; at least it shall end for me."

"I cannot, however, conclude without again acknowledging that, in the sight of men, your life is exemplary, and your walk outwardly blameless" (p. 41).

Mr. Richard Hill added a "Postscript" of ten pages to his long letter, the postscript chiefly consisting of extracts from one of Fletcher's sermons, preached in Madeley Church, eleven years before, and of which Mr. Hill happened to possess a manuscript copy. The text was Rom. xi. 5, 6. Mr. Hill says he regards this sermon as "the best confutation" of Wesley's "Minutes," and of Fletcher's "Checks;" and that, because he so regarded it, he had actually sent it to press; but, doubting the fairness and uprightness of such a proceeding without obtaining the preacher's permission, he had "stopped the publication." Mr. Hill, however, now published *extracts* from the sermon, without Fletcher's permission; and this induced Fletcher to *re-preach* his sermon with additions and explanations. This was done in Madeley Church, on May 23, 1773, and the sermon, thus revised, was published in the First Part of Fletcher's "Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism," in 1774.

It would be easy to pick out of Mr. Hill's "Finishing Stroke" not a few most shameful opprobriums. Fletcher is accused of "descending to the poor illiberal arts of forgery and defamation, in order to *blacken* his opponents, and to establish his own pernicious principles." "He had used high-flown sarcastic declamation, base forgeries, and gross misrepresentations."

Such were some of the acerbities of Richard Hill. He was the slanderer; not Fletcher. The latter was too much a gentleman, to say nothing of his being a Christian, to indulge in such scurrilous vituperation. The two men had been engaged in a theological combat; Hill had been utterly vanquished; and, instead of meekly acknowledging his defeat, he dishonourably abused his victorious opponent. With respect to his conversion, he was more indebted to Fletcher than to any other man; but this was now forgotten. The Vicar of Madeley, whom he had so greatly loved, had become the object of his scorn.

Immediately after the publication of his "Finishing Stroke," Mr. Richard Hill committed to the press another 8vo pamphlet, of 63 pages, entitled, "Logica Wesleiensis; or, The Farrago Double Distilled. With an Heroic Poem in Praise of Mr. John Wesley." Mr. Hill, in addressing Wesley, says:—

"I have never seen you above four or five times in my whole life;

> once in the pulpit at West Street Chapel; once at a friend's house; and once or twice, at my request, you were so kind as to drink a *forbidden dish of tea* with me, when I lodged in Vine Street, St. James's, as I wanted to speak to you concerning a poor man in your connections."

By his own confession, it is evident that Mr. Hill's personal knowledge of Wesley was very slight, and yet, in his "Logica Wesleiensis," he abuses him more ferociously than he had abused Fletcher in his "Finishing Stroke." Of the contumely hurled at Wesley, nothing will be said here, but two or three extracts concerning Fletcher must be introduced:—

> "Mr. Fletcher affirms that all the Protestant Churches, the old Calvinist ministers, and Puritan divines, are on the side of the 'Minutes.' Mr. Hill makes it appear, as clear as the sun, that this is a point-blank falsehood as ever was written" (p. 7).
>
> "Mr. Wesley revised, corrected, and gave his own *imprimatur* to all Mr. Fletcher's *Checks*, throughout which, Mr. John is the Alpha and the Omega" (p. 53).[1]
>
> "Since the foregoing pages were finished in manuscript, I have seen Mr. Fletcher's '*Logica Genevensis*, or *Fourth Check to Antinomianism*.' Though I fully intended to have been silent, the many perversions and misrepresentations which I have detected under the cover of much professed candour, will oblige me once more to enter the lists with my able antagonist; but, despairing of my own skill, I must beg leave to call in the Vicar of Madeley, to be my second; and happily for this purpose I have preserved a sermon of his, which was preached by him only a few years ago, in his own parish church, from Rom. xi. 5, 6. I think it is by far the best refutation of the unscriptural doctrine contained in the 'Minutes,' and in all the 'Checks,' which I have yet seen. As this sermon was publicly delivered before a very numerous congregation, and copies of it handed about, by the preacher's own permission; and as he tells us that he is determined, *God being his helper, to preach the doctrine therein contained, till his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth,*—no reasonable person can think that there is the least unfairness in my availing myself of so powerful an ally; and I solemnly declare, upon the word of a Christian, that, in the few extracts I may make from it, I will not alter the least jot or tittle from the manuscript, and only make some marginal notes and observations upon it" (p. 59).

Mr. Richard Hill might think there was nothing unfair in publishing another man's manuscript without his permission; but men of honour will disagree with him. Even if the manuscript had contained doctrines at variance with some propounded in Fletcher's "Checks," what then? Eleven years had elapsed since the sermon was composed and preached; and surely Fletcher was not to be blamed and lashed if, during such a lengthened period, he had modified some of his theological opinions. Fletcher had no choice left to him but to re-examine his old sermon, and ascertain if it contained anything contrary to the doctrines advocated in his "Checks."

---

[1] This was not true, at all events, so far as the "Fourth Check" was concerned. See Wesley's Works, vol. x., p. 400.

Meanwhile, another opponent had entered the battle-field. Just at this juncture, honest, and good, though eccentric, John Berridge, Vicar of Everton, published his well-known book, entitled, "The Christian World Unmasked. Pray Come and Peep." 12mo, 229 pp. The doctrines so quaintly taught by Berridge were the doctrines of Richard Hill and his Calvinistic friends; but Berridge was too loving a Christian to display Richard Hill's acrimonious spirit. The names of Wesley and Fletcher were not once mentioned in the whole of his performance; though, of course, their tenets were attacked. No one could find fault with this; but Fletcher felt it his duty to answer his dear old friend at Everton. Writing to John Thornton, Esq., on August 18, 1773, Berridge remarked:—

> "In a letter, just received from Mr. Fletcher, he says, 'What you have said about sincere obedience has touched the apple of God's eye, and is the very core of Antinomianism.[1] You have done your best to disparage sincere obedience, and, in a pamphlet ready for the press, I have freely exposed what you have written.' Then he cries out, in a declamatory style, 'For God's sake, let us only speak against insincere and Pharisaical obedience.' Indeed, I thought I had been writing against insincere obedience throughout the pamphlet; and that every one, who has eyes, must see it clearly; but I suppose Mr. Fletcher's spectacles invert objects, and make people walk with their heads downwards."[2]

---

[1] In a letter to the Rev. John Newton, of Olney, dated September 20, 1773, Berridge said, in his own quaint style, "The Vicar of Madeley has sent me word that my prattle, in my pamphlet of 'Sincere Obedience,' 'is the core of Antinomianism, has exposed St. James, and touched the apple of God's eye,' and that he intends to put my head in the pillory, and my nose in the barnacles for so doing." ("Works of Berridge; and Life by Whittingham," p. 386.)

[2] "Works of Berridge; and Life by Whittingham," p. 382.

In another letter to the same gentleman, dated thirteen days afterwards, Berridge observed :—

"I thank you for the friendly admonition you gave me respecting Mr. Fletcher. It made me look into my heart, and I found some resentment there. What a lurking devil this pride is! How soon he takes fire, and yet hides his head so demurely in the embers, that we do not easily discover him! I think it is advisable to write to Mr. Fletcher, though despairing of success. His pamphlet will certainly be published now it is finished. Indeed, I have written to him aforetime more than once, and besought him to drop all controversy; but he seems to regard such entreaties as flowing rather from a fear of his pen than a desire of peace. His heart is somewhat exalted by his writings, and no wonder. He is also endowed with great acuteness, which, though much admired by the world, is a great obstacle to a quiet childlike spirit. And he is at present eagerly seeking after legal perfection, which naturally produceth controversial heat. As Gospel and peace, so law and controversy go hand in hand together. How can lawyers live without strife? In such a situation, I know, from my own former sad experience, he will take the Scotch thistle for his motto, *Noli me tangere.* But his heart seemeth very upright, and his labours are abundant; and I trust the Master will serve him, by-and-by, as he has served me,—put him into a pickling tub, and drench him there soundly. When he comes out, dripping all over, he will be glad to cry, 'Grace, grace,' and 'a little child may lead him.' We learn nothing truly of ourselves, or of grace, but in a furnace.

"Whatever Mr. Fletcher may write against my pamphlet, I am determined to make no reply. I dare not trust my own wicked heart in a controversy. If my pamphlet is faulty, let it be overthrown; if sound, it will rise above any learned rubbish that is cast upon it. Indeed, what signifies my pamphlet, or its author? While it was publishing, I was heartily weary of it; and have really been sick of it since, and concluded it had done no good because it had met with no opposition."[1]

Berridge did write to Fletcher. Hence, in another letter to Mr. Thornton, he said :—

"Everton, September 25, 1773. I have written to Mr. Fletcher, and told him what was my intention in speaking against sincere obedience, and that my intention was manifest enough from the whole drift of my pamphlet. I have also acquainted him that I am an enemy to controversy, and that if his tract is published, I shall not rise up to fight with him, but will be a dead man before he kills me. I further told him I was afraid that Mr. Toplady[2] and himself were setting the Christian world on fire, and the carnal world in laughter, and wished they could both desist from controversy. A letter seemed needful, yet I wrote to him without any hope of success, and it appears there is not any. Mr. Jones, an expelled Oxonian, has just been with him, and called upon me last Saturday. Mr. Fletcher showed him what he had written against my pamphlet. It has been revised by Mr. Wesley, and is to be published shortly."[1]

---

[1] "Works of Berridge; and Life by Whittingham," p. 384.

[2] In the preceding year, Toplady had published his scurrilous pamphlet, with the title, "More Work for Mr. John Wesley; or, A Vindication of the Decrees and Providence of God from the Defamations of a late printed paper, entitled, 'The Consequence Proved.'"

Strangely enough, while Berridge was requesting peace from Everton, Richard Hill was doing the same from Hawkstone. Berridge's three letters to Mr. Thornton cover the space between August 13, 1773, and September 25, 1773; and Richard Hill's three letters to Fletcher, now to be introduced, cover the space between July 31, 1773, and December 23, 1773. Fletcher answered them privately; but his answers have never been published. Mr. Hill's letters, too important to be omitted, were as follows:—

"HAWKSTONE, *July* 31, 1773.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I am credibly informed that you wish to have done with controversy, and that you are resolved to publish nothing more on the subject of the late disputes. Upon the strength of this information, as well as to maintain my own desire of promoting peace, I shall write to my bookseller in London, to sell no more of any of my pamphlets which relate to the 'Minutes;' and for whatever may have savoured too much of my own spirit, either in my answers to you, or to Mr. Wesley, I sincerely crave the forgiveness of you both, and should be most heartily glad if no person whatever were to add another word to what has been already said on either side.

"And permit me to hint, that if some restraint could be laid upon several of Mr. Wesley's preachers, particularly upon one Perronet (of whose superlatively abusive and insolent little piece,[2] I believe, Mr. Charles Wesley testified his abhorrence from the pulpit), I think, under God, it might be a salutary means of preventing the poison of vain janglings from spreading any further. But, though it is the desire of my soul to live in harmony, love, and friendship with you, dear Sir, yet, if God has ever shown me anything of my own heart, or of the truths of His Word, I must, and still do think that your principles are exceedingly erroneous; and of this, I ever cherish a secret hope that God will convince you, in the course of His dealings with your soul.

---

[1] "Works of Berridge; and Life by Whittingham," p. 387.

[2] Probably Edward Perronet's "Small Collection in Verse: containing a Hymn to the Holy Ghost; an Epigram from the Italian," etc. Printed in 1772. 12mo, 16 pp.

"Wishing you abundance of grace, mercy, and peace, I beg leave to subscribe myself, Rev. and dear Sir, your sincere friend in the Gospel of Immanuel, "R. HILL.

"P.S.—I wish, dear Sir, you would make Mr. Wesley acquainted with the contents of this letter; and, if I stop the sale of my books, I hope that of the four 'Checks' will be stopped also."

This letter of Mr. Richard Hill, at the first reading, seems to be peaceable and friendly; but there is reason to fear that the principle that prompted it was cowardice rather than courtesy. Mr. Hill had been vanquished more than once; and, naturally enough, he now wished to retire from the arena. This, however, his opponents could not permit, without sending a shaft after him. In his publications just issued, the "Finishing Stroke," and the "Farrago Double-Distilled," to say nothing of his previous ones, he had most uncharitably accused Fletcher and Wesley not only of ignorances and mistakes, but of sins. He had called Fletcher a "calumniator;" he had charged him with practising "forgery and defamation," and "gross misrepresentations," and "slander." In the "Farrago Double Distilled," he had accused Wesley of using "quirks, quibbles, evasions, and false quotations;" and had designated him "a chameleon." His "Heroic Poem in Praise of Mr. John Wesley" was a disgraceful production, too coarse and vulgar to be quoted. Was it reasonable to wish or expect that no answer should be made to such imputations? Reputation was as dear in the case of John Fletcher and John Wesley as in that of Richard Hill; and, so far as the work of God and the interests of the Church of Christ were concerned, vastly more important. Besides, when Mr. Hill says he was "credibly informed" that Fletcher was "resolved to publish nothing more on the subject of the late disputes," he was the victim of a delusion, for Fletcher was already preparing his "Fifth Check to Antinomianism."

Fletcher's reply to Mr. Hill's first letter has never been published, but its import may be gathered from Mr. Hill's second letter to Fletcher, which was as follows:—

"*August*, 1773.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—Attendance at the assizes, and multiplicity of business in my office as a Justice of the Peace, have prevented my returning a more speedy answer to your letter, in which I find you complain of my having treated you with severity.

"This obliges me to request you to call to mind the four 'Checks,' and then to say what right the author of them has to complain of severity. Read the sneering mock proclamation given by the four secretaries of state of the predestinarian department; read the charges brought against our celebrated pulpits; and, if you can still justify what you have advanced, you may then with better reason accuse me of severity. It pains me to bring these things to your remembrance, as I was determined, when I wrote last, to avoid every shadow of any accusation against you for what had passed; and I think you must acknowledge that my letter was friendly; but your introduction of the subject obliges me to say what I have. I wish I had any grounds to recall what I have said concerning your having laid very great misrepresentations before the public, in your quotations from Mr. Wesley's 'Minutes,'' and in the harmony you would make your readers believe there is between the Reformers and Puritans, and Mr. Wesley and yourself; for it is most sure that your principles and theirs are as wide as east from west.

"How far it may be fair to alter the title of your sermon[1] from what it stands in the manuscript, must be left to yourself; I have no objection to it as you propose to print it. As to your explanatory notes and additions in brackets, you know, Sir, that by these you may easily make the sermon itself speak what language you see proper. Clarke and Priestly, by explanatory notes and additions in brackets, can explain away the divinity of Christ; Socinus, His atonement; and Taylor, the corruption of human nature.

"As you intend to introduce my worthless name into your next publication, I must beg to decline the obliging offer you make of my perusing your MSS. I am, Rev. and dear Sir,

"Your sincere friend for Christ's sake,

"RICHARD HILL."

Mr. Hill's last letter is the best of the three. It was written soon after his mother's death, and a short time before Fletcher's "First Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism" was published. Fletcher offered to allow Mr. Hill to read the work in manuscript, but, as Mr. Hill himself states, the offer was declined.

"HAWKSTONE, *December* 23, 1773.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I take the liberty of requesting you to distribute among the poor of Madeley the enclosed two guineas, in such way and manner as you shall judge fit and proper.

"I sent your last letter to my brother Rowland, who is now at Tottenham Court chapel, and suppose he received it. However, I waive saying anything of the subject of it, as it is my design to have totally done with the controversy, which I am firmly persuaded has not done me any good. Excuse me if I say, I wish you to examine closely whether it has done you any. For my own part, I desire to be humbled before God, as well as to ask your forgiveness and Mr. Wesley's (to whom I purpose making a visit of peace and love when I go to London), for everything that has savoured of wrong or of my own spirit, in what I have written relative to his 'Minutes;' and, though I believe your sentiments to be erroneous, yet I esteem and honour you for all you have said against sin; and for the stand you have made for practical religion in this Laodicean, Antinomian age; and truly concerned should I be, if any expressions have dropped from my pen, which might make the readers think lightly of sin, under the notion of honouring the Saviour from sin. But as God can bear me witness that I had no intentions of this sort, so I am certain that whosoever makes Christ all his salvation, can never at the same time make Him a minister of sin; and I trust the hour will come when, under a deep sense of your own sinfulness and nothingness, you will be glad to lay hold of some of those comfortable Gospel truths, which now you look upon as dangerous poison.

---

[1] The sermon preached in Madeley Church, on May 23, 1773, and afterwards published in the "Fifth Check to Antinomianism."

"In consequence of my former letter to you, I wrote to my bookseller in London, and told Mr. Eddowes in Shrewsbury, to stop the sale of all my publications concerning the controversy between us; and, unless God shows me that it is a matter of duty so to do, I shall not revoke this order; it being my earnest desire for the time to come, if it be possible, to live peaceably with all men; and, though I cannot approve some of Mr. Wesley's doctrines, because I believe them to be contrary to Scripture, and am sure they are contrary to my own experience, yet, as I am persuaded that many who are the excellent of the earth are in his connexion, I wish to confirm my love towards them on account of the grace that is in them; and, whilst I reject their errors, still to esteem their persons; and never to say or do anything that may hurt that common cause for which we all ought to be contending, or which may grieve the weakest or meanest of Christ's people.

"These, dear Sir, are my present sentiments and intentions, and you have my free permission to declare them upon the house-top.

"An afflictive breach, which God has lately been pleased to make in our family, by depriving me of a most tender and affectionate mother, calls upon me to beg your prayers, that the sudden stroke may be sanctified to me and to us all. It loudly bids me remember that I am but a stranger and pilgrim here below. May the Lord give me a pilgrim's spirit! and may He give us both a right judgment in all things!

"Permit me to subscribe myself, Rev. and dear Sir, your sincere friend and servant in Christ,

"RICHARD HILL."

The Christian spirit of this letter cannot be excelled.

What a contrast to that of the "Finishing Stroke," published at the beginning of the year! Mr. Hill gave Fletcher full permission to make known the facts that the controversy had done him no good; that he desired to be humbled before God, and to ask forgiveness of Fletcher and Wesley for everything that had "savoured of wrong," or of his "own spirit," in his writings; that he had stopped the sale of his publications; and that he regarded many of Wesley's people as "the excellent of the earth."

There can be no doubt that Fletcher availed himself of Mr. Hill's permission. The facts did honour to Mr. Hill; but, as is often the case, in the course of circulation, the facts were perverted. By no fault of Fletcher, it was reported that Mr. Hill had recanted the *doctrines* he had so stoutly maintained. This was utterly untrue; and led Mr. Hill to send his three letters to the press.[1] No one could have found fault with this; but, unfortunately, Mr. Hill prefixed a preface to his letters, and appended an appendix.

In his preface, he remarks, that when Wesley heard from Fletcher that he (Mr. Hill) had suppressed the sale of his publications, he wrote Mr. Hill "a short and civil letter," in which he said, he himself intended to write nothing more on the controversy between them, and expressed the hope that all, in the future, would be love and peace. This communication gratified Mr. Hill, and soon afterwards, when he went to London, he had an interview with Wesley at West-street chapel, and assured him of his intentions to retire from the warfare, and said he wished that nothing more should be said on the subject by any one. Wesley took him by the hand; showed a loving, pacific disposition; and, says Mr. Hill, "we parted very good friends."

Besides this personal narrative, however, the preface renewed the slanderous attacks on Fletcher, accusing him of misrepresenting facts, of using "artifices in his manner of making quotations;" and "declamation, chicanery, evasion, false glosses, and pious frauds, to throw dust into the eyes of his readers." Not content with this, he made an onslaught on Thomas Olivers, Wesley's trenchant Itinerant, who (in 1774) had just published a 12mo book of 168 pages, entitled "A Scourge to Calumny. In Two Parts. Inscribed to Richard Hill, Esq." He sneeringly calls him "one Thomas Oliver, alias Olivers, a journeyman cordwainer, who had written a pamphlet against him (Mr. Hill), which, though in itself *black in the grain*, was afterwards *lacquered up*, *new soled*, and *heel-tapped* by his master before it was exposed for sale."

---

[1] The title was, "Three Letters, written by Richard Hill, Esq., to the Rev. J. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, in the year 1773; setting forth Mr. Hill's Reasons for declining any further controversy relative to Mr. Wesley's Principles. Shrewsbury." 8vo., 30 pp.

> "I shall not," continues Mr. Hill, "take the least notice of him, or read a line of his composition,[1] any more than, if I was travelling on the road, I would stop to lash, or even order my footman to lash, every impertinent little quadruped in a village, that should come out and bark at me; but would willingly let the contemptible animal have the satisfaction of thinking he had driven me out of sight."

This was despicable bombast; for the Welsh shoemaker, as a controversial writer, was quite equal to him who, in due time, became a Shropshire baronet. Mr. Hill proceeds to say that he cannot read any more of Fletcher's books, and, therefore, cannot write any more answers to them; but, because it was now currently reported that he had recanted the doctrines which he had defended, he had revoked his orders to stop the sale of his publications, and that his "Five Letters to Fletcher," his "Review of Wesley's Doctrines," his "Farrago Double Distilled," his "Paris Conversation," and his "Finishing Stroke," might now be bought as heretofore.

The Appendix to Mr. Hill's Three Letters suggests a proposed title to Fletcher's works, and sets forth "A Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists," as follows:—

> "ARTICLE I.
>
> "I believe that Jesus Christ died for the whole human race, and that He had no more love towards those who now are, or hereafter shall be, in glory, than for those who now are, or hereafter shall be, lifting up their eyes in torments; and that the one are no more indebted to His grace than the other.

---

[1] If Mr. Hill had not read Thomas Olivers' little book, how is it that he can so graphically describe it?

"ARTICLE II.

"I believe that Divine grace is indiscriminately given to all men; and that God, foreseeing that by far the greater part of the world would reject this grace, doth, nevertheless, bestow it upon them in order to heighten their torments and to increase their damnation in hell.

"ARTICLE III.

"I believe it depends wholly on the will of the creature whether he shall or shall not receive any benefit from Divine grace.

"ARTICLE IV.

"Though the Scripture tells me that the carnal mind is enmity against God, yet I believe there is something in the heart of every natural man that can nourish and cherish the grace of God; and that the sole reason why this grace is effectual in some and not in others, is entirely owing to themselves and to their own faithfulness, and not to the distinguishing love and favour of God.

"ARTICLE V.

"I believe that God sincerely wishes for the salvation of many who never will be saved; consequently, that it is entirely owing to want of ability in God that what He so earnestly willeth is not accomplished.

"ARTICLE VI.

"I believe that the Redeemer not only shed His precious blood, but prayed for the salvation of many souls who are now in hell; consequently, that His blood was shed in vain, and His prayer rejected of His Father; and that, therefore, He told a great untruth when He said, 'I know that Thou hearest me always.'

"ARTICLE VII.

"I believe that God, foreseeing some men's nature will improve the grace which is given them, and that they will repent, believe, and be very good, elects them unto salvation.

"ARTICLE VIII.

"I believe that the love and favour of Him with whom is no variableness and shadow of turning, and whose gifts and callings are without repentance, may vary, change, and turn every hour and every moment, according to the behaviour of the creature.

"ARTICLE IX.

"I believe that the seed of the Word, by which God's children are born again, is a corruptible seed; and that, so far from enduring for ever (as that mistaken apostle Peter rashly affirms), it is frequently rooted out of the hearts of those in whom it was sown.

"ARTICLE X.

"I believe that Christ does not always give unto His sheep eternal life; but that they often perish, and are, by the power of Satan, frequently plucked out of His hand.

"ARTICLE XI.

"Though I have solemnly subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, and have affirmed that I believe them from my heart, yet I think our Reformers were profoundly ignorant of true Christianity, when they declared, in the Ninth Article, that 'the infection of nature doth remain in them which are regenerate;' and, in the Fifteenth, that 'all we, the rest (Christ only excepted), although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things; and *if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.' This I totally deny, because it cuts up, root and branch, my favourite doctrine of *Perfection;* and, therefore, let Peter, Paul, James, or John, say what they will; and let reformers and martyrs join their syren song, their eyes were at best but half opened, for want of a little *Foundery* eye-salve; therefore, I cannot look upon them as adult believers, and fathers in Christ."

The Eleven Articles were subscribed, "J. F.," "J. W.," and "W. S.;" which may be taken as the initial letters of the names of John Fletcher, John Wesley, and Walter Sellon.

"What! more *finishing strokes!*" remarked the *Monthly Review* of January, 1775, in its notice of Mr. Hill's new pamphlet. "This retiring champion, however, like the Parthians of old, is not less formidable in his retreat than in a direct attack. He here lets fly at the *Arminians* and *Perfectionists* one of his sharpest pointed arrows. He styles it '*their creed*.' He says he has 'composed it from their sentiments;' and he adds that he 'can scarcely read it without horror.' Yet he thinks himself justified in publishing it, as Mr. Fletcher still continued the controversy with so much warmth."

All this is deeply to be regretted. Mr. Hill had declared his determination to abandon this painful warfare, and yet here he provokes a continuance of it. It is true that, meanwhile, Fletcher had published his "Answer to the Finishing Stroke" of Mr. Hill; but Fletcher had done this, not because he desired the controversy to be prolonged, but because "The Finishing Stroke" contained so many grave attacks on Fletcher's moral character, that Fletcher's honour could not be maintained without an "Answer" being written. At this point the war might have ended; but, by appending the "Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists" to his Three Letters, Mr. Hill re-opened the sluice, and "the waters of strife" flowed as fiercely as ever.

From a Calvinian point of view, the "Creed" is drawn up with great ability; but Mr. Hill was well aware that it was a misrepresentation of the sentiments of Fletcher and Wesley. Besides, the thing itself was in bad taste. It must be acknowledged that Fletcher had published his "Gospel Proclamation: Given at *Geneva*, and signed by four of his Majesty's principal Secretaries of State for the Predestinarian Department!" but there was no need that Mr. Richard Hill should copy Fletcher's objectionable example.

It is now time, however, to turn to Fletcher's masterly replies.

CHAPTER XV.

"*FIFTH CHECK TO ANTINOMIANISM.*"

1774.

IN a characteristic letter addressed to Ambrose Serle, Esq., and dated "January 11, 1774," Augustus Toplady observed :—

> "Mr. Fletcher may fire off as soon as he pleases. The weapons of his warfare can never wound the truths of God, any more than a handful of feathers can batter down my church tower. I shall, however, be glad to see his performance when it appears. Mr. Shirley told me, when I was last at Bath, that Fletcher is to succeed Pope Wesley, as commander-in-chief of the Societies, if he should survive his holiness. No wonder, therefore, that the Cardinal of Madeley is such a zealous stickler for the cause. One would think that the Swiss were universally fated to fight for pay."[1]

Toplady's mendacious sneer that Fletcher was fighting "for pay" may be scornfully passed over. This letter might refer to Fletcher's "Answer to the Rev. Mr. Toplady's Vindication of the Decrees," which Fletcher finished in the month of October, 1775 ; or it might refer to the expected publication of the "Fifth Check to Antinomianism." The "First Part" of this was completed at Madeley, September 13, 1773 ; but was not published until the beginning of 1774. The following was its title : "*Logica Genevensis* continued : or the First Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism, containing an Answer to '*The Finishing Stroke*' of Richard Hill, Esq. In which some remarks upon *Mr. Fulsome's* Antinomian Creed, published by the Rev. Mr. Berridge, are occasionally introduced. With an Appendix upon the remaining difference between the Calvinists and the Anti-Calvinists, with respect to our Lord's doctrine of *Justification by words*, and St. James's doctrine of *Justification by works, and not by faith only.* London: 1774." 12mo., 48 pp.

---

[1] "Complete Works of Toplady."

Fletcher's "Answer" to Richard Hill's "Finishing Stroke," and his "Remarks upon *Mr. Fulsome's* Antinomian Creed," are able, and characteristic of the writer; but contain no biographical facts worth mentioning. Two extracts, however, from the "Appendix," upon the remaining differences between the Calvinists and the anti-Calvinists, may be useful; inasmuch as, in a condensed form, they exhibit the point to which, in Fletcher's opinion, the controversy had brought both parties with respect to the principal of Wesley's "Minutes" of 1770. Fletcher writes:—

"On both sides, we agree to maintain, in opposition to Socinians and Deists, that the grand, the primary, and properly meritorious cause of our justification, from first to last, both in the day of conversion and in the day of judgment, is only the precious atonement and the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all agree likewise that in the day of conversion faith is the *instrumental cause* of our justification before God. Nay, if I mistake not, we come one step nearer each other, for we equally hold that, after conversion, the works of faith are in this world, and will be in the day of judgment, the *evidencing cause* of our justification; that is, the works of faith (under the above-mentioned primary cause of our salvation, and in subordination to the faith that gives them birth), are now, and will be in the great day, the *evidence* that shall instrumentally *cause* our justification as believers. Thus Mr. Hill says [*Review*, p. 149], 'Neither Mr. Shirley, nor I, nor any Calvinist that I ever heard of, denies that, though a sinner be *justified in the sight of God by Christ alone*, he is *declaratively justified by works, both here and at the day of judgment.*' And the Rev. Mr. Madan, in his sermon on '*justification by works stated, explained, and reconciled with justification by faith*,' says [p. 29], 'By Christ only are we *meritoriously* justified, and by faith only are we *instrumentally* justified *in the sight of God;* but by works, and not by faith only, are we *declaratively justified before men and angels.*' From these two quotations, which could easily be multiplied to twenty, it is evident that pious Calvinists hold the doctrine of a *justification* by the works of faith; or, as Mr. Madan expresses it, after St. James, *by works, and not by faith only.*

"It remains now to show wherein we disagree. At first sight, the difference seems trifling; but, upon close examination, it appears that the whole antinomian gulf still remains fixed between us. Read the preceding quotations, weigh the clauses which I have put in capitals, compare them with what the Rev. Mr. Berridge says in his '*Christian*

World Unmasked' (p. 26), of '*an absolute impossibility of being justified in any manner* by our works,' namely, *before God;* and you will see that though pious Calvinists allow we are justified by works *before men and angels*, yet they deny our being *ever* justified by works *before God*, in whose sight they suppose we are for ever justified by *Christ alone*,' *i.e.*, only by Christ's good works and sufferings, absolutely imputed to us from the very first moment in which we make a single act of true faith, if not from all eternity. Thus works are entirely excluded from having any hand either in our intermediate or final justification *before God;* and thus they are still represented as *totally needless* to our *eternal* salvation. Now, in direct opposition to the above-mentioned distinction, we anti-Calvinists believe that adult persons cannot be saved without being justified *by faith* as *sinners*, according to the light of their dispensation ; and *by works* as *believers*, according to the time and opportunities they have of working. We assert that the *works* of faith are not less necessary to our justification *before God* as believers, than *faith* itself is necessary to our justification *before Him* as sinners. And we maintain that when faith does not produce good works (much more when it produces the worst works, such as adultery, hypocrisy, treachery, murder, etc.), it dies, and justifies no more ; seeing it is a *living* and not a *dead* faith that justifies us as sinners ; even as they are *living* and not dead works that justify us as believers."

Thus did these good men quarrel. Berridge was a man of eminent piety and of great wit, but he could scarcely be considered a great theologian ; and it may be fairly doubted whether he ever held the doctrines which Fletcher, perhaps somewhat hardly, deduces from a few of his unguarded words.

In his next pamphlet, which was published March 1, 1774,[1] Fletcher treats poor Berridge with yet greater severity. The whole work was devoted to an exposure of the objectionable and the weak points in Berridge's "Christian World Unmasked." Its title was "*Logica Genevensis* continued. Or the Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism ; containing a Defence of 'Jack o' lanthorn,' and 'the Paper-kite,' *i.e.*, Sincere Obedience;—of the 'Cobweb,' *i.e.*, The evangelical law of liberty ; and of the 'Valiant Sergeant I. F.,' *i.e.*, The conditionality of Perseverance, attacked by the Rev. Mr. Berridge, M.A., Vicar of Everton, and late Fellow of Clare-hall, Cambridge, in his book called 'The Christian World Unmasked.' London : 1774." 12 mo., 44 pp.

---

[1] *Lloyd's Evening Post*, March 2, 1774.

Berridge was well aware of Fletcher's intention to attack his book, for Fletcher himself, seven months before, had told him that what he had "said about sincere obedience was the very core of Antinomianism," and that he must freely expose what he had written. Berridge, in letters to John Thornton, Esq., and the Rev. John Newton, complained of this, and said Fletcher had misapprehended his meaning. He also wrote to Fletcher to the same effect, and told him that, if he published his attack, he (Berridge) would not answer it. There can be no doubt that Berridge never *intended* to "disparage sincere obedience" to the law of God; but his similes, allegories, figures, and loose language, might be construed by Antinomian readers in such a sense. Fletcher believed Berridge to be a sincere, earnest, obedient Christian; but he also believed that Berridge's well-meant book might be turned to a bad account by men with whose Antinomian sentiments Berridge had no sympathy. In the introduction to his pamphlet, Fletcher writes:—

> "Before I mention Mr. Berridge's mistakes, I must do justice to his person. It is by no means my design to represent him as a divine, who either leads a loose life, or *intends* to hurt the Redeemer's interest. His conduct as a Christian is exemplary; his labours as a minister are great; and I am persuaded that the wrong touches which he gives to the ark of godliness are not only undesigned, but *intended* to do God service.
>
> "There are so many things commendable in the pious vicar of Everton, and so much truth in his 'Christian World Unmasked,' that I find it a hardship to expose the unguarded parts of that performance. But the cause of this hardship is the ground of my apology. Mr. Berridge is a good, an excellent man; therefore the Antinomian errors which go abroad into the world with his letters of recommendation, speak in his evangelical strain, and are armed with the poignancy of his wit, cannot be too soon pointed out and too carefully guarded against. I flatter myself that this consideration will procure me his pardon for taking the liberty of dispatching his 'valiant sergeant' with some doses of rational and Scriptural antidote for those who have drunk into the pleasing mistakes of his book, and want his piety to hinder them from carrying speculative into practical Antinomianism."

It would weary the reader to follow Fletcher in his minute, sometimes pungent, and always irrefutable criticisms on Berridge's well-known book. There is often plain speaking, but there is no acidity. Berridge is routed, but he is invariably treated as a Christian and a gentleman. Fletcher's "Conclusion" is as follows:—

> "Were I to conclude these strictures upon the dangerous tenets, inadvertently advanced and happily contradicted, in 'The Christian World Unmasked,' without professing my brotherly love and sincere respect for the ingenious and pious author, I should wrong him, myself, and the cause which I defend. I only do him justice when I say that few, very few, of our elders equal him in devotedness to Christ, zeal, diligence, and ministerial success. His indefatigable labours in the word and doctrine entitle him to a double share of honour; and I invite all my readers to esteem him highly in love for his Master's and his work's sake; entreating them not to undervalue his vital piety on account of his Antinomian opinions; and beseeching them to consider that his errors are so much the more excusable as they do not influence his moral conduct, and that he refutes them himself far more than his favourite scheme of doctrine allows him to do. Add to this that those very errors spring, in a great degree, from the idea that he honours Christ by receiving, and does God service by propagating them.
>
> "The desire of catching the attention of his readers has made him choose a witty, facetious manner of writing, for which he has a peculiar turn; and the necessity I am under of standing his *indirect* attack[1] obliges me to meet him upon his own ground, and to encounter him with his own weapons. I beg that what passes for evangelical humour in him may not be called indecent levity in me. A sharp pen may be guided by a kind heart; and such, I am persuaded, is that of my much-esteemed antagonist, whom I publicly invite to my pulpit; protesting that I should be edified and overjoyed to hear him enforce there the *guarded* substance of his book, which, notwithstanding the vein of solifidianism I have taken the liberty to open, contains many great and glorious truths."

In all his publications, Fletcher had not only Wesley's approval, but his high commendation. In three several letters, written during the present year, 1774, Wesley thus expressed his opinion of Fletcher:—

> "March 1, 1774.—He" [James Perfect], "preaches salvation by faith in the same manner that my brother and I have done; and as Mr. Fletcher (one of the finest writers of the age) has beautifully explained it. None of us talk of being accepted for our works; that is the Calvinist slander. But we all maintain we are not saved without works;

---

[1] As previously stated, Fletcher's name was not mentioned in Berridge's book, but the book was intended to ridicule and denounce the doctrines which Fletcher, in his "*Checks*," had defended.

that works are a condition (though not the meritorious cause) of final salvation. It is by faith in the righteousness and blood of Christ that we are enabled to do all good works; and it is for the sake of these that all who fear God and work righteousness are accepted of Him."[1]

"May 2, 1774. Until Mr." (Richard) "Hill and his associates puzzled the cause, it was as plain as plain could be. The Methodists always held, and have declared a thousand times, that the death of Christ is the meritorious cause of our salvation, that is, of pardon, holiness, and glory; loving, obedient faith is the condition of glory. This Mr. Fletcher has so illustrated and confirmed, as, I think, scarcely any one has done before since the Apostles."[2]

"December 28, 1774. If we could once bring all our preachers, itinerant and local, uniformly and steadily to insist on those two points, 'Christ dying for us,' and 'Christ reigning in us,' we should shake the trembling gates of hell. I think most of them are now exceeding clear herein, and the rest come nearer and nearer; especially since they have read Mr. Fletcher's 'Checks,' which have removed many difficulties out of the way."[3]

Such was one of the services which Fletcher, "one of the finest writers of the age," had rendered to Wesley's preachers and people as early as the year 1774. They had been in danger of departing from the truth, or, at least, stumbling at it: by Fletcher's help, they were confirmed in the Christian faith, and henceforth earnestly contended for it.

As already seen, in 1773 Mr. Richard Hill had extended to Fletcher the olive branch of peace; and now the Countess of Huntingdon seems to have done the same. Three years before, she had virtually dismissed him from her Calvinistic College at Trevecca, because he would not renounce what were called the "*horrible and abominable*" doctrinal "Minutes" of Wesley's Conference in 1770. Since then, he had been incessantly employed in explaining and defending these "Minutes;" and, in every instance, had vanquished his opponents. Her ladyship, with her strong-mindedness, seemed to perceive this, and wished to have an interview with her disbanded president. She was staying at Bath, and through James Ireland, Esq., of Bristol, the intimate friend of both, her wish appears to have been conveyed to Fletcher; who, in reply, wrote to Mr. Ireland as follows:—

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol xii., p. 372.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 373.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 430.

"MADELEY, *February* 6, 1774.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—In the present circumstances, it was a great piece of condescension in dear Lady Huntingdon to be willing to see me privately: but for her to permit me to wait upon her *openly* denotes such generosity, such courage, and a mind so much superior to the narrowness that clogs the charity of most professors, that it would have amazed me, if everything that is noble and magnanimous were not to be expected from her ladyship. It is well for her that spirits are imprisoned in flesh and blood, or I might by this time (and it is but an hour since I received your letter) have troubled her ten times with my apparition, to wish her joy of being above the dangerous snare of professors—the smiles and frowns of the religious world; and to thank her a thousand times for not being ashamed of her old servant, and for cordially forgiving him all that is past, upon the score of the Lord's love, and of my honest meaning.

"But though, on reading your letter, my mind has travelled so fast to Bath, yet an embargo is laid upon my body—'I must not go yet.' I am the more inclined to take the hint, for two reasons. I will tell you all my heart about it. The more I see her ladyship's generosity, and admire the faithfulness of the friendship that she has for many years honoured me with, the more I ought to take care not to bring burdens upon her. It might lessen her influence with those she is connected with; and might grieve some of her friends, who possibly would look upon her condescension as an affront to them. This is the first reason.

"The second respects myself. *I must follow my light.* A necessity is laid upon me to clear my conscience with respect to the *Antinomian world*, and to point out the stumbling-block that keeps many serious people from embracing the real doctrines of free grace. I cannot do this without advancing some truths, which I know her ladyship receives as well as myself, but which, by my manner of unfolding them, will, at first sight, appear dreadful touches to the Gospel of the day. I am just sending to the press 'A Scriptural Essay upon the Astonishing Rewardableness of the Works of Faith.' Though it consists only of plain Scriptures, and plain arguments, without anything personal, I think it will raise more dust of prejudice against me than my preceding publications. With respect to myself, I do not mind it; but I am bound in love to mind it with respect to her ladyship. My respect for her ladyship, therefore, together with the preceding reason, determine me to defer paying my respects *personally* to her, till after the publication of my 'Essay,' and 'Scripture Scales;' and, if she does not then revoke the kind leave she gives me, I shall most gladly make the best of my way to assure her in person, as I do now by this indirect means, that I am, and shall for ever be her dutiful servant in what appears to me the plain Gospel of our common Lord.

"With love to yourself, and dutiful love to our noble friend, I am, etc.,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 221.

Nothing need be said respecting Fletcher's considerate kindness in declining, for the present, an interview with the Countess of Huntingdon, lest he should become the means of bringing upon her undeserved reproach from some of her bigoted and narrow-hearted friends. It was like the man, and worthy of him.

In another letter to Mr. Ireland, Fletcher further refers to the returning friendliness of the Countess, and to his controversial and exhausting labours, of which he was becoming weary:—

"MADELEY, *March* 27, 1774.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I think I wrote my last two days before I received your bounty—a large hogshead of rice and two cheeses. Accept the thanks of myself and of my poor flock. I distributed it on Shrove-Tuesday, and preached to a numerous congregation on 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.' We prayed for our benefactor, that God would give him a hundredfold in this life, and eternal life, where life eternal will be no burden. I saw then, what I have not often seen on such occasions, gladness without the appearance of envying or grudging.

"I get very slowly out of the mire of my controversy, and yet I hope to get over it, if God spares my life, in two or three pieces more. Since I wrote last, I have added to my 'Equal Check' a piece which I call 'An Essay on Truth; or, a Rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith,' which I have taken the liberty to dedicate to Lady Huntingdon, to have an opportunity of clearing her ladyship from the charge of Antinomianism. I have taken this step in the simplicity of my heart, and as due from me, in my circumstances, to the character of her ladyship.

"I have just spirit enough to enjoy my solitude, and to bless God that I am out of the hurry of the world—even the spiritual world. I tarry gladly in my Jerusalem, till the kingdom of God comes with power. Till then, it matters not where I am: only as my chief call is here, here I gladly stay, till God fits me for the pulpit or the *grave*. I still spend my mornings in scribbling. Though I grudge so much time in writing, yet a man must do something; and I may as well investigate truth as do anything else, except solemn praying and visiting my flock. I shall be glad to have done with my present avocation, that I may give myself up more to those two things.

"O how life goes! I walked, now I gallop into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise: embrace we Jesus and the resurrection. Let us trim our lamps, and give ourselves afresh to Him that bought us, till we can do it without reserve. Adieu!

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p 223.

CHAPTER XVI.

FURTHER PUBLICATIONS IN THE YEAR 1774.

IN *Lloyd's Evening Post* for March 2, 1774, there appeared the following advertisement :—

"*In the Press.* An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism; and the Scripture Scales to weigh Gospel Truth; both by the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire."

"*The Scripture Scales,*" however, were published separately, and not until the year was ending. First of all, Fletcher issued a 12mo. volume of 264 pages, entitled, "The First Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism, containing, I. An Historical Essay on the Danger of parting Faith and Works. II. Salvation by the Covenant of Grace, A Discourse preached in the Parish Church of Madeley, April 18, and May 9, 1773. III. A Scriptural Essay on the astonishing Rewardableness of Works, according to the Covenant of Grace. IV. An Essay on Truth, or, A rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith, with a dedicatory Epistle to the Right Hon. the Countess of Huntingdon. By the Author of the Checks to Antinomianism. Shrewsbury: Printed by J. Eddowes: and sold at the Foundery; and by J. Buckland, in Paternoster Row, London; by T. Mills in Bath; and S. Aris in Birmingham. 1774."

Fletcher's Preface is dated, Madeley, May 21, 1774. The following extracts from it convey an idea of the scope of his book :—

"I. The first piece of this Check was designed for a preface to the Discourse that follows it; but as it swelled far beyond my intention, I present it to the reader under the name of *An Historical Essay*, which makes way for the tracts that follow.

"II. With respect to the Discourse, I must mention what engages me to publish it. In 1771, I saw the propositions called the '*Minutes*.' Their author invited me to '*review the whole affair*.' I did so; and soon found that I had 'leaned too much toward Calvinism,' which, after mature consideration, appeared to me exactly to coincide with *speculative* Antinomianism; and the same year I publicly acknowledged my error.[1]

"When I had thus openly confessed that I was involved in the guilt of *many of my brethren*, and that I had so leaned towards *speculative* as not to have made a proper stand against *practical* Antinomianism, who could have thought that one of my most formidable opponents[2] would have attempted to screen his mistakes behind some passages of a manuscript sermon which I preached twelve years ago, and of which, by some means or other, he has got a copy?

"I am very far from recanting that old discourse. I still think the doctrine it contains excellent, in the main, and very proper to be enforced, though in a more guarded manner, in a congregation of hearers violently prejudiced against the first gospel axiom.[3] Therefore, out of regard for the grand, leading truth of Christianity, and in compliance with Mr. Hill's *earnest entreaty* ('Finishing Stroke,' p. 45), I send my sermon into the world upon the following reasonable conditions: 1. That I shall be allowed to publish it, as I preached it a year ago in my church, namely, with *additions in brackets*, to make it at once a *fuller* Check to Pharisaism, and a *finishing* Check to Antinomianism. 2. That the largest addition shall be in favour of *free grace*. 3. That nobody shall accuse me of *forgery*, for thus adding my present light to that which I had formerly; and for thus bringing out of my little treasure of experience *things new and old*. 4. That the press shall not groan with the charge of *disingenuity*, if I throw into Notes some unguarded expressions, which I formerly used without scruple, and which my more enlightened conscience does not suffer me to use at present. 5. That my opponent's call to print my sermon will procure me the pardon of the public, for presenting them with a plain, *blunt*, discourse, composed for an audience chiefly made up of colliers and rustics. And, lastly, that, as I understand English a little better than I did twelve years ago, I shall be permitted to rectify a few French idioms, which I find in my old manuscript; and to *connect* my thoughts a little more like an Englishman, where I can do it without the least misrepresentation of the sense.

---

[1] In the "Second Check to Antinomianism."

[2] Mr. Richard Hill.

[3] Thus defined by Fletcher in his "Doctrines of Grace and Justice:" "Our salvation is of God; or, There is free grace in God; which, through Christ, freely places all men in a state of temporary redemption, justification, or salvation, according to the various Gospel dispensations, and crowns those who are faithful unto death with an eternal redemption, justification, or salvation."

His definition of the second Gospel axiom is, "Our damnation is of ourselves: or, There is a free-will in man; by which he may, through the grace freely imparted to him in the day of temporary salvation, work out his own eternal salvation; or he may, through the natural power which angels had to sin in heaven, and our first parents in paradise, choose to sin away the day of temporary salvation. And by thus working out his damnation, he may provoke just wrath, which is the same as despised free grace, to punish him with eternal destruction."

"III. With regard to the '*Scriptural Essay*' upon the rewardableness or evangelical worthiness of works, I shall just observe that it attacks the grand mistake of Solifidians countenanced by three or four words of my old sermon. I pour a flood of Scriptures upon it; and, after receiving the fire of my objector, I return it in a variety of scriptural and rational answers, about the solidity of which the public must decide.

"IV. The '*Essay on Truth*' will, I hope, reconcile judicious moralists to the doctrine of salvation *by faith*, and considerate Solifidians to the doctrine of salvation *by* the *works* of faith; reason and Scripture concurring to show the constant dependence of works upon faith; and the wonderful agreement of the doctrine of present salvation by TRUE *faith*, with the doctrine of eternal salvation by GOOD *works*.

"I hope that I do not dissent, in my observations upon *faith*, either from our Church, or approved Gospel ministers. In their *highest* definitions of that grace, they consider it *only* according to the fulness of the *Christian* dispensation; but my subject has obliged me to consider it also according to the dispensations of John the Baptist, Moses, and Noah. Believers under these *inferior* dispensations have not always *assurance*, nor is the assurance they sometimes have so bright as that of adult Christians, Matt. xi. 11. But, undoubtedly, assurance is inseparably connected with the faith of the *Christian* dispensation, which was not *fully* opened till Christ opened *His* glorious baptism on the Day of Pentecost, and till His spiritual kingdom was set up with power in the hearts of His people. Nobody, therefore, can truly believe, according to *this* dispensation, without being *immediately* conscious both of the forgiveness of sins, and of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. This is a most important truth, derided indeed by fallen Churchmen, and denied by Laodicean Dissenters; but, of late years gloriously revived by Mr. Wesley and the Ministers connected with him."

From these extracts, the reader may gather the difficult and important doctrines discussed by Fletcher in his book of pamphlets. In a work like this it is impossible to follow him in his careful statements of truth, in the arguments by which he proves them, and in his answers to objections raised against them; but a few remarks respecting some of these publications must be attempted.

In a prelude to his sermon first delivered in 1762, and now amended, Fletcher gives a doleful picture of what he himself had witnessed during the interval. He says:—

"The substance of the following Discourse was committed to paper many years ago, to convince the Pharisees and papists of my parish that there is no salvation by the faithless works of the law, but by a living faith in Jesus Christ. With shame I confess that I did not *then* see the need of guarding the doctrine of *faith* against the despisers of *works*. I was chiefly bent upon pulling up the tares of Pharisaism: those of Antinomianism were not yet sprung up in the field, which I began to cultivate: or my want of experience hindered me from discerning them. But since, what a crop of them have I perceived and bewailed!

"Alas! they have, in a great degree, ruined the success of my ministry. I have seen numbers of lazy seekers, enjoying the dull pleasure of sloth on the couch of wilful unbelief, under pretence that God was to do all in them without them. I have seen some lie flat in the mire of sin, absurdly boasting that they could not fall; and others make the means of grace means of idle gossiping or sly courtship. I have seen some turn their religious profession into a way of gratifying covetousness or indolence; and others, their skill in church music, their knowledge, and their zeal, into various nets to catch esteem, admiration, and praise. Some I have seen making *yesterday's* faith a reason to laugh at the cross *to-day;* and others drawing, from their misapprehensions of the atonement, arguments to be less importunate in secret prayer, and more conformable to this evil world than once they were. Nay, I have seen some professing believers backward to do those works of mercy, which I have sometimes found persons, who made no profession of godliness, quite ready to perform. And—oh! tell it in Sion, that watchfulness may not be neglected by believers, that fearfulness may seize upon backsliders, and that trembling may break the bones of hypocrites and apostates—I have seen those who had equally shined by their gifts and graces strike the moral world with horror by the grossest Antinomianism, and disgrace the doctrine of *salvation through faith* by the deepest plunges into scandalous sins."

As already stated, Fletcher's "Essay on Truth; or, Rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith," was dedicated to his quondam friend and patroness, the Countess of Huntingdon, who again desired his friendship, his counsel, and his prayers. In his "Dedicatory Epistle" he says:—

"MY LADY,—Because I think it my duty to defend the *works of faith* against the triumphant errors of the Solifidians, some of your ladyship's friends conclude that I am an enemy to the doctrine of *salvation by faith*, and their conclusion amounts to such exclamations as these: 'How could a lady, so zealous for God's glory and the Redeemer's grace, commit the superintendency of a seminary of pious learning to a man that opposes the *fundamental* doctrine of Protestantism! How could she put her sheep under the care of such a wolf in sheep's clothing!' This conclusion, my lady, has grieved me for your sake; and, to remove the blot that it indirectly fixes upon you, as well as to balance my 'Scriptural Essay on the Rewardableness' of the works of faith, I publish, and humbly dedicate to your ladyship, this last piece of my '*Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism.* May the kindness which enabled you to bear for years with the coarseness of my ministrations incline you favourably to receive this little token of my unfeigned attachment to Protestantism, and of my lasting respect for your ladyship!

"Your aversion to all that looks like controversy can never make you think that an *Equal Check* to the two grand delusions, which have crept into the Church, is needless in our days. I flatter myself, therefore, that though you may blame my *performance*, you will approve of my *design*. And indeed what true Christian can be absolutely neuter in this controversy? If *God has a controversy* with all *Pharisees* and *Antinomians*, have not all God's children a controversy with *Pharisaism* and *Antinomianism?* Have you not, for one, my lady? Do you not check in private what I attempt to check in public? Does not the religious world know that you abhor, attack, and pursue *Pharisaism* in its most artful disguises? And have I not frequently heard you express, in the strongest terms, your detestation of *Antinomianism*, and lament the number of sleeping professors, whom that Delilah robs of their strength? Nor would you, I am persuaded, my lady, have countenanced the opposition which was made against the 'Minutes,' if your commendable, though (as it appears to me) at that time, too precipitate zeal against Pharisaism had not prevented your seeing that they contain the Scripture truths, which are fittest to stop the rapid progress of Antinomianism.

"However, if you still think, my lady, that I mistake with respect to the importance of those propositions, you know I am not mistaken when I declare, before the world, that a *powerful*, *practical*, *actually saving* faith is the only faith I ever heard your ladyship recommend, as worthy to be contended for. And so long as you plead only for such a faith, so long as you abhor the winter-faith that saves the Solifidians, in their own conceit, while they commit adultery, murder, and incest, if they choose to carry Antinomianism to such a dreadful length; so long as you are afraid to maintain, either directly or indirectly, that the *evidence* and *comfort* of justifying faith may be suspended by sin, but that the *righteousness* of faith, and the *justification* which it instrumentally procures, can never be lost, no, not by the most enormous and complicated crimes,—whatever diversity there may be between your ladyship's sentiments and mine, it can never be fundamental. I preach salvation by a faith that *actually* works by obedient love, and your ladyship witnesses salvation by an *actually* operative faith; nor can I, to this day, see any material difference between those phrases in the present controversy. I remain, with my former respect and devotedness, my lady, your ladyship's most obliged and obedient servant in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER.

"Madeley, *March* 12, 1774."

Fletcher's "Essay on Truth" is one of his ablest and most important works. It is full of his own peculiar genius, and—what cannot be said concerning all his writings—it is very readable. The following brief extracts from it may be acceptable and useful:—

Saving faith. "What is *saving* faith?[1] I dare not say that it is 'believing heartily' my sins are forgiven me for Christ's sake; for, if I live in sin, that belief is a *destructive* conceit, and not *saving* faith. Neither dare I say, that 'saving faith is *only* a sure trust and confidence that Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me;'[2] for, if I did, I should almost damn all mankind for four thousand years. Such definitions of saving faith are, I fear, too *narrow* to be just, and too *unguarded* to keep out Solifidianism.[3] To avoid such mistakes; to contradict no Scriptures; to put no black mark of *damnation* upon any man, that in any nation fears God and works of righteousness; to leave no room for Solifidianism, and to present the reader with a definition of faith adequate to *the everlasting Gospel*, I would choose to say, that justifying or saving faith is *believing* the saving truth *with the heart unto* internal, and (as we have opportunity) *unto* external *righteousness*, according to our light and dispensation. To St. Paul's words, Rom. x. 10, I add the epithets *internal* and *external*, in order to exclude, according to 1 John iii. 7, 8, the filthy imputation, under which fallen believers may, if we credit the Antinomians, commit internal and external adultery, mental and bodily murder, without the least reasonable fear of endangering their faith, their interest in God's favour, and their inamissable title to a throne of glory."

---

[1] As usual, these extracts are made from the *original* edition, and the *italics* are Fletcher's own.

[2] In a foot-note, Fletcher remarks, "When the Church of England and Mr. Wesley give us particular definitions of faith, it is plain that they consider it according to the *Christian* dispensation; the privileges of which must be principally insisted upon among Christians."

[3] Solifidianism, now a favourite word with Fletcher, is thus defined by him, in his "Fifth Check to Antinomianism:"—"Solifidianism is the doctrine of Solifidians; and the Solifidians are men who, because sinners are justified *sola fide*, 'by sole faith,' in the day of conversion, infer, as Mr. Berridge, that 'believing is the total term of all salvation,' and conclude, as Mr. Hill, that the doctrine of final justification by the works of faith in the great day is 'full of rottenness and deadly poison.' It is a softer word for Antinomianism."

Faith the gift of God, and the act of man. "How is faith the gift of God? Some persons think that faith is as much out of our power as the lightning that shoots from a distant cloud; they suppose that God drives sinners to the fountain of Christ's blood, as irresistibly as the infernal *legion* drove the herd of swine into the sea of Galilee."

After amply refuting this "*absurd*" idea, Fletcher proceeds:—

"Having thus exposed the erroneous sense in which some people suppose that *faith is the gift of God,* I beg leave to mention in what sense it appears to me to be so. *Believing* is the gift of the *God of Grace,* as *breathing, moving,* and *eating* are the gifts of *the God of Nature.* He gives me lungs and air, that I may breathe; He gives me life and muscles, that I may move; He bestows upon me food and a mouth, that I may eat; but He neither *breathes, moves,* nor *eats* for me. Nay, when I think proper, I can accelerate my breathing, motion, and eating: and, if I please, I may *fast, lie down,* or *hang myself,* and, by that means, put an end to my *eating, moving,* and *breathing. Faith* is the gift of God to believers, as *sight* is to you. The parent of good freely gives you the light of the sun, and organs proper to receive it. Everything around you bids you use your eyes and see; nevertheless, you may not only drop your curtains, but close your eyes also. This is exactly the case with regard to faith. Free grace removes, in part, the total blindness which Adam's fall brought upon us; free grace gently sends us some beams of truth, which is the light of *the sun of righteousness;* it disposes the eye of our understanding to see those beams; it excites us, in various ways, to welcome them; it blesses us with many, perhaps with all the means of faith, such as opportunities to hear, read, enquire, and power to consider, assent, consent, resolve, and re-resolve to believe the truth. But, after all, *believing* is as much our own act as *seeing.* We may in general do, suspend, or omit the *act* of faith. Nay, we may do by the eye of our faith, what some report Democritus did by his bodily eyes. Being tired of seeing the follies of mankind, to rid himself of that disagreeable sight, he put his eyes out. We may be so averse from *the light, which enlightens every man* that *comes into the world;* we may so dread it because our works are evil, as to exemplify, like the Pharisees, such awful declarations as these: *Their eyes have they closed, lest they should see: wherefore God gave them up to a reprobate mind,* and, *they were blinded.*"

It need not be added, that Fletcher abundantly sustains these figurative arguments by scriptural quotations.

Two extracts more. In his description of "*saving faith,*" Fletcher refuses to put the "black mark of damnation upon any man, that in any nation fears God and works righteousness." In his "Appendix to Prevent Objections," he explains his meaning, as follows:—

"I make no more difference between the faith of a righteous heathen, and the faith of a father in Christ, than I do between daybreak and meridian light:—That the light of a sincere Jew is as much one with the light of a sincere Christian, as the light of the sun in a cold, cloudy day in March is one with the light of the sun in a fine day in May:—And that the difference between the saving faith peculiar to the sincere disciples of Noah, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, consists in a variety of *degrees*, and not in a diversity of *species;* saving faith, under all the dispensations, agreeing in the following essentials: 1. It is begotten by the revelation of some saving truth presented by free grace, impressed by the Spirit, and received by the believer's prevented free agency. 2. It has the same original cause in all, that is, the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. 3. It *actually* saves all, though in various degrees. 4. It sets all upon *working righteousness; some bearing fruit thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.* And 5. Through Christ, it will bring all that do not make shipwreck of it to one or another of the '*many mansions*,' which our Lord is gone to prepare in heaven for His *believing, obedient* people.

"And here honesty obliges me to lay before the public an objection, which I had for some time against the *appendages* of the Athanasian Creed. I admire the scriptural manner in which it sets forth the Divine Unity in Trinity, and the Divine Trinity in Unity; but I can no longer use its damnatory clauses. It abruptly takes us to the very top of the *Christian* dispensation, considered in a doctrinal light. This dispensation it calls *the Catholic faith;* and, without mentioning the faith of the inferior dispensations, as our other Creeds do, it makes us declare, that '*except everyone keep that faith*' (the faith of the highest dispensation) '*whole* and *undefiled, he cannot be saved; without doubt, he shall perish everlastingly.*' This dreadful denunciation is true with regard to proud, ungodly infidels, who, in the midst of all the means of *Christian* faith, obstinately, maliciously, and finally set their hearts against the doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; equally despising the Son's atonement, and the Spirit's inspiration. But I will no more invade Christ's tribunal, and pronounce that the fearful punishment of damnation shall '*without doubt*' be inflicted upon '*every*' Unitarian, Arian, Jew, Turk, and heathen, *that fears God and works righteousness*, though he does not *hold the faith* of the Athanasian Creed *whole.* For, if you except the last Article, thousands, yea, millions, are never called to hold it *at all;* and therefore shall never perish for not *holding it whole.* At all hazards, then, I hope I shall never use again those damnatory clauses, without taking the liberty of guarding them agreeably to the doctrine of the dispensations. And if Zelotes presses me with my subscriptions, I reply beforehand, that the same Church, who required me to subscribe to St. Athanasius's Creed, enjoins me also to believe this clause of St. Peter's Creed, '*In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.*' And, if those two creeds are irreconcilable, I think it more reasonable that Athanasius should bow to Peter, warmed by the Spirit of love, than that Peter should bow to Athanasius, heated by controversial opposition."

Some will object to Fletcher's teaching. Be it so: the writer's business is neither to defend nor to condemn; but simply to show, as far as possible, what Fletcher's opinions were. John Wesley approved them. "Mr. Fletcher," says he, in a letter dated January 17, 1775, "has given us a wonderful view of the different dispensations. I believe that difficult subject was never placed in so clear a light before. It seems God has raised him up for this very thing—

"'To vindicate eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to man.'"[1]

Fletcher himself, evidently, felt great interest in his "Essay on Truth." In a letter, dated March 20, 1774, and addressed to the Rev. Joseph Benson, he observed:—

"I do not repent having engaged in the present controversy, for, though I think my little publications cannot reclaim those who are given up to believe the lie of the day, yet, they may here and there stop one from swallowing it at all, or from swallowing it so deeply as otherwise he might have done. In preaching, I do not meddle with the points discussed, unless my text leads me to it, and then I think them important enough not to be ashamed of them before my people.

"I am just finishing an 'Essay on Truth,' which I dedicate to Lady Huntingdon, wherein you will see my latest views of that important subject. My apprehensions of things have not changed since I saw you last; save that in one thing I have seen my error. An over-eager attention to the doctrine of the Spirit has made me, in some degree, overlook the medium by which the Spirit works—I mean the *Word of Truth*, which is the word by which the heavenly fire warms us. I rather expected lightning, than a steady fire by means of fuel. I mention my error to you lest you should be involved therein.

"My controversy weighs upon my hands; but I must go through with it; which I hope will be done in two or three pieces more: one of which, 'Scripture Scales to Weigh the Gold of Gospel Truth,' may be more useful than the Checks, as being more literally scriptural.

"I have exchanged a couple of friendly letters with Lady Huntingdon, who gives me leave to see her publicly; but I think it best to postpone that honour till I have cleared my mind."[2]

Charles Wesley read and criticized the "Essay on Truth," upon which Fletcher wrote him as follows:—

"I am glad you did not altogether disapprove my '*Essay on Truth.*' The letter, I grant, profiteth little, until the Spirit animate it. I had, some weeks ago, one of those touches which realize, or rather spiritualize the letter; and it convinced me more than ever that what I say in that tract, of the *Spirit* and of *faith*, is *truth.* I am also persuaded that the *faith* and *Spirit*, which belong to *perfect* Christianity, are at a very low ebb, even among believers. When the Son of Man cometh to set up His kingdom, shall He find *Christian* faith upon the earth? Yes; but, I fear, as little as He found of Jewish faith, when He came in the flesh. I believe you cannot rest with the easy Antinomian, or the busy Pharisee. You and I have nothing to do but to die to all that is of a sinful nature, and to pray for the power of an endless life. God make us faithful to our convictions, and keep us from the snares of outward things. You are in danger from music, children, poetry; and I from speculation, controversy, sloth, etc. Let us *watch* against the deceitfulness of self and sin in all their appearances.

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xiii., p. 52.
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"What power of the Spirit do you find among the believers in London? What openings of the kingdom? Is the well springing up in many hearts? Are many souls dissatisfied, and looking for the kingdom of God in power? Watchman! what of the night? What of the day? What of the dawn?

"I feel the force of what you say about the danger of so encouraging the inferior dispensations, as to make people rest short of the faith which belongs to perfect Christianity. I have tried to obviate it in some parts of the '*Equal Check*,' and hope to do it more effectually in my reply to Mr. Hill's *Creed for Perfectionists.* Probably, I shall get nothing by my polemic labours, but loss of friends, and charges of 'novel chimeras' on *both* sides. I expect a letter from you on the subject. Write with openness, and do not fear to discourage me by speaking your disapprobation of what you dislike. My aim is to be found at the feet of all, bearing and forbearing until truth and love bring better days.

"I am, rev. and dear Sir, your most affectionate brother and son in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 224.

CHAPTER XVII.

PUBLICATIONS IN THE YEAR

1775.

ON November 12, 1774, Fletcher wrote :—

"The author of the '*Checks*' has promised to his readers an answer to the Rev. Mr. Toplady's piece, entitled, '*More Work for Mr. Wesley.*'[1] His reason for postponing the finishing of *that part* of his '*Logica Genevensis*' was the importance of the '*Equal Check*,' which closes the controversy with Mr. Hill. He saw life so uncertain, that, of two things which he was obliged to do, he thought it his duty to set about that which appeared to him the more useful. He considered also that it was proper to have quite done with Mr. Hill, before he faced so able a writer as Mr. Toplady. And he hoped, that, to lay before the judicious a complete system of truth, which, like the sun, recommends itself by its own lustre, was perhaps the best method to prove that error, which shines only as a meteor, is nothing but a mock-sun. However, he fully designs to perform his engagement in a short time, if his life is spared."

This was prefixed to the *first* edition of the following work, which, at that time, was in the press: "Zelotes and Honestus[2] Reconciled ; or, an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism Continued : Being the First Part of the Scripture Scales to weigh the Gold of Gospel Truth,—to balance a multitude of opposite Scriptures,—to prove the Gospel-Marriage of *Free-Grace* and *Free-will*,—and to restore primitive harmony to the Gospel of the day. With a Preface, containing some Strictures upon the Three Letters of Richard Hill, Esq. ; which have been lately published."

---

[1] This was published in 1772, and will be noticed shortly.

[2] "Zelotes," says Fletcher, "represents any zealous Solifidian, who looks upon the doctrine of free-will as heretical : Honestus, any zealous moralist, who looks upon the doctrine of free grace as enthusiastical."

This was Fletcher's largest work. It was published in two parts, but it was continuously paged, the whole making a 12 mo. vol. of 444 pages.

Mr. Hill's "Three Letters" were published in 1773, just after the publication of his "Finishing Stroke." The letters have been given in a previous chapter. Fletcher had answered them privately; and now, in a preface to his present work, he replied publicly. After stating that Mr. Hill's pamphlet "had been hawked about the parish of Madeley" by the newsman, he proceeds to say:—

"Mr. Hill quits the field; but it is like a brave Parthian. He not only shoots his own arrows as he retires, but borrows those also of two persons, whom he calls '*a very eminent minister in the Church of England*' and '*a lay gentleman of great learning and abilities*.' As I see neither argument nor Scripture in the performances of those two new auxiliaries, I shall take no notice of their ingrafted productions.

"With respect to Mr. Hill's arguments, they are the same which he advanced in his '*Finishing Stroke;*' nor need we wonder at his not scrupling to produce them *over again*, just as if they had been overlooked by his opponent, for in the first page of his book he says, '*I have not read a single page which treats on the subject since I wrote* my FINISHING STROKE.'

"As Mr. Hill's arguments are the same, so are also his personal charges. After passing some compliments upon me as an '*able defender* of Mr. Wesley's principles,' he continues to represent me as '*prostituting noble endowments to the advancing of a party*.' He affirms, without shadow of proof, that he has '*detected many misrepresentations of facts throughout*' my '*publications*.' He accuses me of using '*unbecoming artifices, much declamation, chicanery, and evasion;*' and says, '*upon these accounts I really cannot, with any degree of satisfaction, read the works of one who, I am in continual suspicion*, is *endeavouring to mislead me by false glosses and pious frauds*.'

"I cannot but still love and honour Mr. Hill on *many, very* many, accounts. Though his warm attachment to what *he* calls 'the doctrines of grace,' and what *we* call 'the doctrines of *limited* grace and *free wrath*,' robs him from time to time of *part* of the moderation, patience, and meekness of wisdom which adorn the *complete* Christian character, I cannot but consider him as a very valuable person. I do not doubt but when the paroxysm of his Calvinistic zeal shall be over, he will be as great an ornament to the Church of England in the capacity of a gentleman, as he is to civil society in the capacity of a magistrate. And justice, as well as love, obliges me to say that in the mean time he is, in several respects, a pattern for all gentlemen of fortune; few equalling him in devoting a large fortune to the relief of the poor, and their leisure hours to the support of what they esteem the truth. Happy would it be for him, and for the peace of the Church, if to all his good qualities he always added *the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;* and if he so far suspected his orthodoxy as to condescend to weigh himself in the '*Scripture Scales*.' "

Fletcher's preface to his "Scripture Scales" is "humbly addressed to the true Protestants in Great Britain and Ireland."

"The Reformers," says he, "*protested* three things in general:— 1. That right reason has an important place in matters of faith. 2. That all matters of faith may and must be decided by Scripture, understood reasonably and consistently with the context. 3. That antiquity and fathers, traditions and councils, canons and the Church, lose their authority when they depart from sober reason and plain Scripture. These three general *protests* are the very ground of our religion when it is contradistinguished from Popery. They who stand to them deserve, in my humble opinion, the title of *true Protestants*.

"If the preceding account is just, *true* Protestants are all *candid;* Christian candour being nothing but a readiness to hear right *reason* and plain *Scripture*. Of all the tempers which true Protestants abhor, none seems to them more detestable than that of those *gnostics*, those pretenders to superior illumination, who, under the common pretence of *orthodoxy* or *infallibility*, shut their eyes against the light, think plain Scripture beneath their notice, enter their protest against reason, and steel their breasts against conviction. Alas! how many professors there are who, like St. Stephen's opponents, judges, and executioners, are neither able to resist nor willing to admit the truth; who make their defence by *stopping their ears, and crying out*, '*The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!*' who thrust the supposed heretic out of their sanhedrim; who, from the press, the pulpit, or the doctor's chair, send volleys of hard insinuations or soft assertions, in hope that they will pass for solid arguments; and who, when they have no more stones or snowballs to throw at the supposed Philistine, prudently avoid drawing '*the sword of the Spirit*,' retire behind the walls of their fancied orthodoxy, raise a rampart of slanderous contempt against the truth that besieges them, and obstinately refuse either candidly to give up, or manfully contend for, the unscriptural tenets which they will impose upon others as pure Gospel.

"Whether some of my opponents, good men as they are, have not a little inclined to the error of those sons of prejudice, I leave the candid reader to decide. They have neither answered nor yielded to the arguments of my 'Checks.' They are shut up in their own city. Strong and high are thy walls, O mystical Jericho! Thy battlements reach into the clouds, but *truth*, the spiritual ark of God, is stronger, and shall prevail. The bearing of it patiently around thy ramparts, and the blowing of rams' horns in the name of the Lord, will yet shake the very foundations of thy towers. Oh that I had the honour of successfully mixing my feeble voice with the blasts of the champions who encompass the devoted city! Oh that the irresistible shout, *Reason and Scripture —Christ and the Truth*—were universal! If this were the case, how soon would Jericho and Babylon—Antinomianism and Pharisaism—fall together.

"These two anti-Christian fortresses are equally attacked in the following pages.

"The controversy is one of the most important which was ever set on foot. The GRAND inquiry, '*What shall I do to be saved?*' is entirely suspended on this GREATER question, '*Have I anything* TO DO *to be eternally saved?*' A question this which admits of three answers:— 1. That of the *mere Solifidian*, who says, If we are *elect*, we have nothing to do in order to eternal salvation, unless it be to believe that Christ has done all for us, and then to sing *finished salvation;* and if we are not *elect*, whether we do nothing, little, or much, eternal ruin is our *inevitable* portion. 2. That of the *mere moralist*, who is as great a stranger to the doctrine of *free grace* as to that of free wrath; and tells you that there is no free, initial salvation for us, and that we must work ourselves into a state of initial salvation by dint of care, diligence, and faithfulness. And 3. That of their *reconciler*, whom I consider as a rational Bible Christian, and who asserts (1) that Christ has done the part of a Sacrificing Priest and teaching Prophet upon earth, and does still that of an Interceding and Royal Priest in heaven, whence He sends His Holy Spirit to act as an enlightener, sanctifier, comforter, and helper in our hearts; (2) that *the free gift* of initial salvation, and of one or more talents of saving grace, '*is come upon all*' through the God-man Christ, who '*is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe;*' and (3) that our free will, assisted by that saving grace imparted to us in the free gift, is enabled to work with God in a subordinate manner, so that we may freely (*without necessity*) do the part of penitent, obedient, and persevering believers, according to the Gospel dispensation we are under.

"This is the plan of this work, in which I equally fight for faith and works, for gratuitous mercy and impartial justice; reconciling all along Christ our *Saviour* with Christ our *Judge*, heated Augustin with heated Pelagius, free grace with free will, Divine goodness with human obedience, the faithfulness of God's promises with the veracity of His threatenings, *first* with *second* causes, the original merits of Christ with the derived worthiness of His members, and God's foreknowledge with our free agency.

"The plan, I think, is generous; standing at the utmost distance from the extremes of bigots. It is deep and extensive; taking in the most interesting subjects, such as the origin of evil, liberty, and necessity, the law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ, general and particular redemption, the apostacy and perseverance of the saints, and the election and reprobation maintained by St. Paul. I entirely rest the cause upon *Protestant* ground; that is, upon *Reason* and *Scripture*.

Nevertheless, to show our antagonists that we are not afraid to meet them upon any ground, I prove, by sufficient testimonies from the fathers and the Reformers, that the most eminent divines in the primitive Church and our own, have passed the straits which I point out; especially when they weighed the heavy anchor of prejudice, had a good gale of Divine wisdom, and steered by the Christian mariner's compass, '*the Word of God,*' more than by the *false lights* hung out by party men."

It is hoped that these quotations from the preface of Fletcher's book will induce the reader to peruse and study the book itself. To analyse it here is impracticable; and if one extract were given, hundreds ought to follow. In this frothy age, the book to many will seem dry and tedious; but to a man sincerely and earnestly in search of sacred truth it will prove a mine full of invaluable treasures.

At the end of the *first* edition, the following was printed:—

"Advertisement.

"The key to the controversy, which is designed to be ended by the '*Scripture Scales,*' proving too long for this place, the publication of it is postponed. It *may* one day open the way for *An Essay on the XVIIth Article,* under the following title: 'The Doctrines of Grace Reconciled to the Doctrines of Justice. Being an Essay on Election and Reprobation, in which the defects of *Pelagianism, Calvinism,* and *Arminianism* are impartially pointed out, and primitive, scriptural harmony is more fully restored to the Gospel of the day.'"

This was not published until the year 1777; but it is mentioned here to show that, in substance, it was already written, and, thereby, to show the activity of Fletcher's mind, and the accumulated labours which soon broke down his health.

No sooner was the publication of his "Scripture Scales," or "Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism," completed, than he committed to the press the following: "The Fictitious and the Genuine Creed: Being 'A Creed for Arminians,' composed by Richard Hill, Esq.; to which is opposed 'A Creed for those who believe that *Christ tasted death for every man.*' By the author of the 'Checks to Antinomianism.' London, 1775." 12mo, 52 pp.

The reader will remember that, in bad taste, Fletcher, in 1772, had published, in his "Fourth Check to Antinomianism," a "sweet gospel proclamation: Given at Geneva, and signed by four of His Majesty's principal Secretaries of State for the Predestination Department—John Calvin, Dr. Crisp, The Author of P.O." (Richard Hill), "and Rowland Hill." This provoked Richard Hill; and, when he published his "Three Letters written to the Rev. J. Fletcher, in the year 1773," he, in equally bad taste, attached an "Appendix" to his Letters, entitled, "A Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists." Now, in 1775, Fletcher felt it his duty to examine the Creed so ingeniously drawn up by Mr. Hill, and to expose its fallacies. The following is an extract from Fletcher's preface:—

> "With regard to our extensive views of Christ's redemption by price, Mr. Hill calls us *Arminians:* and with respect to our believing that there is no perfect faith, no perfect repentance in the grave; that the *Christian* graces of repentance, faith, hope, patience, etc., must be perfected *here* or never; and with respect to our *confidence* that Christ's blood, fully applied by His Spirit, and apprehended by faith, can cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness before we go into the purgatory of the *Calvinists*, or into that of the *papists*, that is, before we go into the valley of the shadow of death, or into the suburbs of hell—with respect to this *belief* and *confidence*, I say, Mr. Hill calls us *Perfectionists;* and, appearing once more upon the stage of our controversy, he has lately presented the public with what he calls, '*A Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists*, which he introduces in these words: '*The following confession of faith, however shocking, not to say blasphemous, it may appear to the humble Christian, must inevitably be adopted, if not in express words*, yet, *in substance, by every Arminian* and *Perfectionist whatsoever; though the last article of it chiefly concerns such as are ordained ministers in the Church of England.*' And, as among such ministers, Mr. J. Wesley, Mr. W. Sellon, and myself peculiarly oppose Mr. Hill's Calvinian doctrines of *absolute election* and *reprobation*, and of a *death-purgatory*, he has put the initial letters of our names to his Creed; hoping, no doubt, to make us peculiarly ashamed of our principles. And, indeed, so should we be, if any '*blasphemous*' or '*shocking*' consequence '*inevitably*' flowed from them."

Probably, by this time, the reader is tired of Creeds. He has had Fletcher's Creed for an Antinomian; Mr. Richard Hill's Creed for Arminians and Perfectionists; and now he has, in "The Fictitious and the Genuine Creed," Fletcher's Creed for Methodists. The last may be dry reading, but it contains truths of the utmost importance,—truths which Fletcher spent the greatest part of his literary life in endeavouring to explain and to defend ; and, speaking generally, truths which Wesley himself endorsed, embraced, and taught. Fletcher concludes his pamphlet with the following scrap of autobiography :—

"I shall close this answer to the Creed, which Mr. Hill has composed *for Arminians*, by an observation which is not foreign to our controversy. In one of the 'Three Letters' which introduce the Fictitious Creed, Mr. Hill says, '*Controversy, I am persuaded, has not done me any good;*' and he exhorts me to examine myself closely whether I cannot make the same confession. I own that it would have done me harm, if I had blindly contended for my opinions. Nay, if I had shut my eyes against the light of truth ;—if I had set the plainest Scriptures aside, as if they were not worth my notice ;—if I had overlooked the strongest arguments of my opponents ;—if I had advanced groundless charges against them ;—if I had refused to do justice to their good meaning or piety ;—and, above all, if I had taken my leave of them by injuring their moral character, by publishing over and over again arguments, which they have properly answered, without taking the least notice of their answers ;—if I had made a solemn promise not to read one of their books, though they should publish a thousand volumes ;—if, continuing to write against them, I had fixed upon them (as '*unavoidable*' consequences) absurd tenets, which have no more necessary connexion with their principles than the doctrine of general redemption has with Calvinian reprobation. If I had done this, I say, controversy would have wounded my conscience or my reason ; and, without adding anything to my light, it would have immovably fixed me in my prejudices, and perhaps branded me before the world for an *Arminian bigot.* But, as matters are, I hope I may make the following acknowledgments without betraying the impertinence of proud boasting.

"Although I have often been sorry that controversy should take up so much of the time which I might, with much more satisfaction to myself, have employed in devotional exercises; and although I have lamented, and do still lament, my low attainments in the *meekness of wisdom*, which should constantly guide the pen of every controversial writer; yet, I rejoice that I have been enabled to persist in my resolution, either to wipe off, or to share the reproach of those who have hazarded their reputation in defence of pure and undefiled religion. And, if I am not mistaken, my repeated attempts have been attended with these happy effects :—

"In vindicating the *moral* doctrines of grace, I hope that, as a *man*, I have learned to think more closely, and to investigate truth more ardently, than I did before.

"As a *divine*, I see more clearly the gaps and stiles, at which mistaken good men have turned out of the narrow way of truth, to the right hand and to the left.

"As a *Protestant*, I hope I have much more esteem for the Scriptures in general, and in particular for those practical parts of them, which the Calvinists had insensibly taught me to overlook, or despise. And this increasing esteem is, I trust, accompanied with a deeper conviction of the truth of Christianity, and with a greater readiness to defend the Gospel against infidels, Pharisees, and Antinomians.

"As a *Preacher*, I hope I can now do more justice to a text by reconciling it with seemingly contrary Scriptures.

"As an *Anti-Calvinist*, I have learned to do the Calvinists justice, in granting that there is an *election of distinguishing grace* for God's peculiar people, and a *particular redemption* for all believers who are faithful unto death. I can more easily excuse pious Calvinists, who, through prejudice, mistake *that* Scriptural election for *their* Antinomian election; and who consider *that* particular redemption as the only redemption mentioned in the Scriptures. Nay, I can, without scruple, allow Mr. Hill that his doctrines of *finished salvation* and *irresistible* grace are *true* with respect to all those who die in their infancy.

"As one who is called an *Arminian*, I have found out some flaws in *Arminianism*, and evidenced my impartiality in pointing them out, as well as the flaws of Calvinism.

"As a *Witness* for the truth of the Gospel, I hope I have learned to bear reproach from all sorts of people with more undaunted courage. And I humbly trust, that, were I called to seal with my blood the truth of the *doctrines of grace* and *of justice*, against the *Pharisees* and *Antinomians*, I could (Divine grace supporting me to the last) do it more rationally, and of consequence with greater steadiness.

"As a *Follower of Christ*, I hope I have learned to disregard my dearest friends for my Heavenly Prophet; or, to speak the language of our Lord, I hope I have learned to *forsake father*, *mother*, *and brothers for Christ's sake, and the Gospel's*.

"As a *Disputant*, I have learned that solid arguments, and plain Scriptures, make no more impression upon bigotry, than the charmer's voice does upon the deaf adder; and, by that means, I hope, I depend less upon the powers of reason, the letter of the Scriptures, and the candour of professors, than I formerly did.

"As a *Believer*, I have been brought to see and feel that the power of the Spirit of truth, which teaches men to be *of one heart*, *and of one mind*, and makes them *think and speak the same*, is at a very low ebb in the religious world.

"As a *Member of the Church of England*, I have learned to be pleased with our holy Mother, for giving us floods of pure morality to wash away the few remaining Calvinian freckles that remain upon her face.

"As a *Christian*, I hope I have learned, in some degree, to exercise that charity, which teaches us boldly to oppose a dangerous error without ceasing to honour and love its abettors, so far as they resemble our Lord.

"And, lastly, as a *Writer*, I have learned to feel the truth of Solomon's observation, '*Of making many books there is no end, and*

> *much study is a weariness of the flesh: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man;*' and the sum of the *Anti-Solifidian* truth, which I endeavour to vindicate.
>
> "I do not say that I have learned any of these lessons as I should have done; but I hope I have learned so much of them as to say that, in these respects, my controversial toil has not been altogether in vain in the Lord."

The reader must excuse these long extracts; for there seems to be no better way of giving a correct and full idea of Fletcher's views and character.

At the end of the first edition of his pamphlet, Fletcher inserted the following "Advertisement":—

> "Mr. Hill's '*Creed for Arminians*' is followed by his plea for the *inbred man of sin*. This indirect and witty plea he calls, '*A Creed for Perfectionists*.' But, as that part of his performance has no immediate connection with the doctrines vindicated in the preceding pages, I design to make my remarks upon it in a separate Tract."

This "Tract," as Fletcher calls it, seems to have been already written, for it was forthwith published, and entitled, "The Last Check to Antinomianism. A Polemical Essay on the Twin Doctrines of Christian Imperfection and a Death Purgatory. By the Author of the Checks. London: 1775. 12mo., 328 pp.

At this time, the Rev. Thomas Reader, a Dissenting Minister, at Taunton, held a position similar to that which had been held by Doddridge, at Northampton. He was the President of a College for training Independent Ministers, and was a zealous Calvinist. When Fletcher's new book was published, Mr. Reader read it, and was so angry with its contents that he started off to Madeley, a long journey, to rebuke the author for his heresy. Arriving at his destination, he hastened to the vicarage, knocked loudly at the door, told the servant who he was, and requested an interview with the Vicar. Fletcher, knowing him by name, ran from his study to receive his visitor, and spreading out his hands, exclaimed, "Come in, come in, thou blessed of the Lord! Am I so honoured as to receive a visit from so esteemed a servant of my Master? Let us have a little prayer, while refreshments are getting ready." Mr. Reader was puzzled.

He remained three days, but was utterly unable to muster sufficient courage to even intimate the object of his visit. Afterwards he stated that he never enjoyed three days of such spiritual and profitable intercourse in all his life.[1]

Fletcher's books, prayers, conversations, and tempers were a glorious manifestation of the truths he taught in his elaborate and able treatise on Christian Perfection,—a treatise never equalled, except by the treatise and the sermons of Wesley on the same subject. Wesley and Fletcher are easily understood; modern writers on this all-important doctrine are too often mystics, or, rather, mystifiers. The former expounded Scripture, the latter disastrously obscure Scripture by what they consider to be philosophy. The Methodists need no new exposition of this old Methodist truth. Never can it be more plainly stated and more indisputably proved, than it is in the "Plain Account" of Wesley, and the "Polemical Essay" of his friend Fletcher. Well would it be if the present race of Methodists would read these, in preference to the bewildering trash so injuriously read in the stead of them. Truth never changes! and changes of society can never justify the *new* settings forth of truth, nowadays so ignorantly demanded.

A brief analysis of Fletcher's invaluable book, and a few extracts from it, must be given.

In reference to the word "Perfection," which occasioned so much offence, Fletcher writes:—

> "*Christian Perfection!* Why should the harmless phrase offend us? *Perfection!* Why should that lovely word frighten us? The word *predestinate* occurs but four times in all the Scriptures; and the word *predestination* not once; and yet Mr. Hill would justly exclaim against us, if we showed our wit, by calling out for '*a little Foundery*' (or Tabernacle) 'eye-salve' to help us to see the word *predestination once* in *all* the Bible. Not so the word *perfection.* It occurs, with its derivatives, as frequently as most words in the Scripture; and not seldom in the very same sense in which we take it; nevertheless, we do not lay an undue stress upon the expression; and, if we thought that our condescension would answer any good end, we would give up that harmless and significant word."

In reply to the unfair and untrue taunt that Wesley and

---

[1] "Methodism in North Devon," p. 115.

Fletcher taught the doctrine of *sinless* perfection, Fletcher makes an admirable quotation from Wesley :—

> "To explain myself a little farther on this head: 1. Not only SIN, *properly so called*, that is, a *voluntary* transgression of a known law, but *sin* IMPROPERLY so called, that is, an *involuntary* transgression of a divine law, known or unknown, needs the atoning blood. 2. I believe there is no such perfection in this life, as excludes these *involuntary* transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. 3. Therefore, SINLESS *perfection* is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. 4. I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. 5. Such transgressions you may call *sins* if you please; I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned."

Fletcher then proceeds to prove that "Pious Calvinists have had, *at times*, nearly the same views of Christian Perfection" that he and Wesley had.

> "They dissent from us," says he, "because they confound the anti-evangelical law of innocence and the evangelical law of liberty—peccability and sin—Adamic and Christian Perfection; and because they do not consider that Christian Perfection, falling infinitely short of God's *absolute* perfection, admits of a daily *growth*.

The third section of Fletcher's work is occupied with answers to popular objections; and the fourth amply proves that the doctrine for which he is contending is a doctrine taught in the formularies of the Church of England.

Mr. Hill, in the Eleventh Article of his "Fictitious Creed," had made Fletcher, Wesley, and Walter Sellon, not only deny "The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England," which they had "solemnly subscribed," but also the *truthful* teaching of four Apostolical writers in the New Testament. With excessively bad taste, he had represented them as saying, "Let Peter, Paul, James, and John say what they will, and let the Reformers and Martyrs join their syren-song, their eyes were at best but half opened, for want of a little Foundery eye-salve." Accordingly, the fifth and five following sections of Fletcher's book are devoted to a refutation of this scandalous and almost profane slander. A large number of texts, from the Epistles of these four inspired writers, are most ably examined and explained,—texts incontestably proving that the doctrine of Christian Perfection was a doctrine taught by "Peter, Paul, James, and John."

In the eleventh section of his book, Fletcher triumphantly answers the objections, founded upon certain texts in the writings of Solomon, Isaiah, and Job; and in the twelfth he adduces "a variety of arguments to prove the *absurdity* of the twin doctrines of *Christian Imperfection* and a *Death-Purgatory*." In this, he furnishes a definition of Christian Perfection worthy of being quoted, namely:—

> "*Christian Perfection* is nothing but the *depth* of evangelical repentance, the *full* assurance of faith, and the *pure* love of God and man shed abroad in a *faithful* believer's heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto him, to cleanse him, and to keep him clean, *from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit;* and to enable him to *fulfil the law of Christ* according to the talents he is entrusted with, and the circumstances in which he is placed in *this* world."

In the next section (the thirteenth) Fletcher dwells upon "the *mischievousness* of the doctrines of *Christian Imperfection, and a Death Purgatory*." He concludes his scathing arguments on this subject as follows:—

> "The modish doctrine of Christian imperfection and death-purgatory is so contrived that carnal men will always prefer the purgatory of the Calvinists to that of the Papists. For the Papists prescribe I know not how many cups of divine wrath and dire vengeance, which are to be drunk by the souls of believers who die *half*-purged, or *three parts* cleansed. These *half-damned*, or a *quarter-damned* creatures must go through a severe discipline, and fiery salvation in the very suburbs of hell, before they can be perfectly purified. But our opponents have found out a way to deliver *half-hearted* believers out of all fear in this respect. Such believers need not *utterly abolish the body of sin* in this world. The inbred man of sin not only *may*, but he *shall* live as long as we do. You will possibly ask: 'What is to become of this sinful guest? Shall he take us to hell, or shall we take him to heaven? If he cannot die in this world, will Christ destroy him in the next?' No: here Christ is almost left out of the question. Our indwelling adversary is not to be destroyed by the brightness of the Redeemer's spiritual appearing, but by the gloom of the appearance of death. The king of terrors comes to the assistance of Jesus's sanctifying grace, and instantaneously delivers the carnal believer from indwelling pride, unbelief, covetousness, peevishness, uncharitableness, love of the world, and inordinate affection. The dying sinner's breath does the capital work of the Spirit of holiness. By the most astonishing of all miracles,

the faint, infectious, last gasp of a sinful believer blows away, in the twinkling of an eye, the great mountain of inward corruption, which all the means of grace, all the faith, prayers, and sacraments of twenty, perhaps of forty years, were never able to remove. If this doctrine is true, how greatly was St. Paul mistaken when he said, '*The sting of death is sin.*' Should he not have said, *Death is the cure of sin*, instead of saying, '*Sin is the sting* of death'? And should not his praises flow thus,—'*Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through death;* our great and only deliverer from our greatest and fiercest enemy, *indwelling sin*'?''

The fourteenth section of Fletcher's book is employed in answering the false and pernicious statements contained in Toplady's "Caveat against Unsound Doctrine," and Martin Madan's "Essay on Galatians v. 17." In the two following sections, Fletcher proves that his doctrine of Christian perfection "cannot be justly reproached as Popish, and Pelagian; and shows the distinction which exists" between *sins* and *innocent infirmities.* Then he concludes his invaluable book with four Addresses: 1. "To perfect Christian Pharisees; 2. To prejudiced Imperfectionists; 3. To imperfect Perfectionists; and 4. To perfect Christians." These addresses will always rank among the most powerful productions of Fletcher's pen; but, for want of space, only one extract from them can be given here; and even that is, to a large extent, an extract from Wesley's Sermon on "The Scripture Way of Salvation." It is, however, of the highest importance, as containing an answer to the question, How are we to be "sanctified, saved from sin, and perfected in love?" Fletcher writes:—

''I have already pointed out the close connexion there is between an act of *faith* which *fully* apprehends the sanctifying promise of the Father, and the power of the Spirit of Christ which makes an end of moral corruption by forcing the lingering man of sin *instantaneously* to breathe out his last. Mr. Wesley, in the above quoted sermon, touches upon this delicate subject in so clear and concise a manner, that, while his discourse is before me, for the sake of those who have it not in hand, I shall transcribe the whole passage, and, by this means, put the seal of that eminent divine to what I have advanced, in the preceding pages, about sanctifying faith, and the quick destruction of sin.

''' Does God work this great work in the soul *gradually* or *instantaneously?* Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some, I mean in this sense: They do not advert to the particular moment, wherein sin ceases to be. But it is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin by the *breath of His mouth*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so He generally does,—a plain fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person. *Thou* therefore look for it every moment. Look for it in the way above described;[1] in all those *good woks*, whereunto thou art created anew in Christ Jesus. There is then no danger; you can be no worse, if you are no better for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed of your hope, still you lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your hope; it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it *now*, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or works. If by works, you want something to be done *first, before* you are sanctified. You think, 'I must first *be* or do thus or thus.' Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it *as you are;* and, if as you are, then expect it *now*. It is of importance to observe that there is an inseparable connexion between these three points, expect it by *faith*, expect it *as you are*, and expect it *now*. To deny one of them is to deny them all; to allow one is to allow them all. Do *you* believe we are sanctified *by faith?* Be true then to your principle; and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better, nor worse; as a poor sinner, that has still nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but—*Christ died*. And if you look for it *as you are*, then expect it *now*. Stay for nothing, why should you? Christ is ready, and He is all you want. He is waiting for you; He is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out,—

> "'Come in, come in, Thou heavenly guest!
> Nor hence again remove:
> But sup with me, and let the feast
> Be everlasting love.'" (p. 288).

Well would it be, for the Church and the world, if these views of Wesley and his friend Fletcher were held by all the Methodists of the present age, or even by a thousandth part of them. How often are they preached in Methodist pulpits? Not so often as they ought to be! "Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached," said Wesley, "there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God; and, consequently, little addition to the Society, and little life in the members of it."[1]

---

[1] After most ably arguing the matter, Wesley, in the sermon here referred to, concludes "that faith is the only condition which is *immediately* and *proximately* necessary to sanctification;" and that the "faith whereby we are sanctified—saved from sin, and perfected in love, is a divine evidence and conviction, first, that God hath promised it in the Holy Scripture; secondly, that what God hath promised, He is able to perform; thirdly, that He is able and willing to do it now; and, fourthly, a divine evidence and conviction that He doeth it. In that hour," continues Wesley, "it is done; God says to the inmost soul, 'According to thy faith, be it unto thee!' Then the soul is pure from every spot of sin; it is clean 'from all unrighteousness.' The believer then experiences the deep meaning of those solemn words, 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'"

The year 1775 was to Fletcher one of the busiest in his life. He was steeped in controversy; but he rose in piety. In a letter to his friend Joseph Benson, he wrote:—

> "I have had two printers at my heels, besides my common business, and this is enough to make me trespass upon the patience of my friends. I have published the first part of my '*Scales*,' which has gone through a second edition in London, before I could get the second part printed in Salop, where it will be published in about six weeks. I have also published a creed for the Arminians, where you will see that, if I have not answered your critical remarks upon my Essay on Truth, I have improved by them, yea publicly recanted the two expressions you mentioned as improper.
>
> "I am so tied up here, both by my parish duty and controversial writings, that I cannot hope to see you unless you come into these parts.[2] In the meantime, let us meet at the throne of grace. In Jesus, time and distance are lost. He is an universal, eternal life of righteousness, peace, and joy. I am glad you have some encouragement in Scotland. The Lord grant you more and more! Use yourself, however, to go against wind and tide, as I do; and take care that our wise dogmatical friends in the north do not rob you of your childlike simplicity. Remember that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to babes. You may be afraid of being a fool, without being afraid of being a babe. You may be childlike without being childish. Simplicity of intention and purity of affection will go through the world, through hell itself. In the meantime, let us see that we do not so look at our little publications, or to other people, as to forget that Christ is our Object, our Sun, our Shield. To His inspiration, comfort, and protection, I earnestly recommend your soul; and the labours of your *heart*, tongue, and pen to His blessing."[3]

At this period, Wesley was dangerously ill in Ireland.

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 252.

[2] Joseph Benson was appointed to the Edinburgh Circuit at the Conference of 1774; and to the Newcastle Circuit at the Conference of 1775.

[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

Charles Wesley had no hope of his brother's recovery. The Methodists throughout the kingdom were in consternation. In a letter to Joseph Bradford, Wesley's faithful companion, Charles Wesley wrote :—

"Bristol, June 29, 1775. Your letter has cut off all hope of my brother's recovery. The people here, and in London, and every place, are swallowed up in sorrow. But sorrow and death will soon be swallowed up in life everlasting. You will be careful of my brother's papers, etc., till you see his executors. God shall reward your fidelity and love. I seem scarce separated from him whom I shall so very soon overtake. We were united in our lives, and in our death not divided."[1]

In his deep distress, Charles Wesley wrote to Fletcher, who replied as follows :—

"MADELEY, *July* 2, 1775.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—The same post which brought me yours, brought me a letter from Ireland, informing me of the danger of your dear brother, my dear father, and of his being very happy in, and resigned to, the will of God. What can you and I do? What, but stand still, and see the salvation of God? The nations are before Him but as the dust that cleaves to a balance; and the greatest instruments have been removed. Abraham is dead; the fathers are dead; and if John come first to the sepulchre, you and I will soon descend into it. The brightest, the most burning and shining lights, like the Baptist, Mr. Whitefield, and your brother, were kindled to make the people rejoice in them, 'for a season,' says our Lord. 'For a season.' The expression is worth our notice. It is just as if our Lord had said, 'I give you inferior lights, that ye may rejoice in them for a season. But I reserve to myself the glory of shining for ever. The most burning lights shall fail on earth; but I, your Sun, will shine to all eternity.'

"Come, my dear brother, let the danger of our lights make us look to our Sun more steadily; and should God quench the light of our Jerusalem below, let us rejoice that it is to make it burn brighter in the Jerusalem which is above; and let us triumph in the inextinguishable light of our Sun, in the impenetrable strength of our Shield, and in the immovableness of our Rock.

"Amidst my concern for the Church in general, and for Mr. Wesley's Societies in particular, I cannot but acknowledge the goodness of God in so wonderfully keeping him for so many years, and in preserving him to undergo such labours as would have killed you and me ten times over. The Lord may yet hear prayer and add a span to his useful life. But forasmuch as the immortality of the body does not belong to this state, and he has fulfilled the ordinary term of human life, in hoping the best, we must prepare ourselves for the worst. The God of all grace and power will strengthen you on the occasion.

---

[1] Tyerman's "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. iii., p. 204.

"Should your brother fail on earth, you are called not only to bear up under the loss of so near a relative, but, for the sake of your common children in the Lord, you should endeavour to fill up the gap according to your strength. The Methodists will not expect from you your brother's labours; but they have, I think, a right to expect that you will preside over them while God spares you in the land of the living. A committee of the oldest and steadiest preachers may help you to bear the burden and to keep up a proper discipline both among the people and the rest of the preachers; and if at any time you should want my mite of assistance, I hope I shall throw it into the treasury with the simplicity and readiness of the poor widow, who cheerfully offered her next to nothing. Do not faint. The Lord God of Israel will give you additional strength for the day; and His angels, yea, His praying people, will bear you up in their hands, that you hurt not your foot against a stone; yea, that if need be, you may leap over a wall.

"I am by this time grey-headed as well as you, and some of my parishioners tell me that the inroads of time are uncommonly visible upon my face. Indeed, I feel as well as see it myself, and learn what only time, trials, and experience can teach. Should your brother be called to his reward, I would not be free to go to London till you and the preachers had settled all matters. My going just at such a time" [as this] "would carry the appearance of vanity, which I abhor. It would seem as if I wanted to be somebody among the Methodists.

"We here heartily join the prayers of the brethren for your brother, for you, and the Societies. Paper fails, not love. Be careful for nothing. Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. Farewell in Christ."[1]

Two and a half years before this dangerous illness, Wesley had requested Fletcher to be his successor in presiding over the Methodists. Perhaps Charles Wesley was aware of this. At all events, he appears to have wished Fletcher to come to London in the great crisis which had now occurred. Fletcher modestly declined; and, fortunately for both, no successor of Wesley was needed until several years after both were dead.

Fletcher's "Checks to Antinomianism" were ended. For four years, he had taxed his energies to the utmost; but the work he undertook in 1771 was now nearly concluded. The doctrines of Wesley's "Minutes" had been carefully explained, minutely defended, and lovingly enforced.

---

[1] Jackson's "Life of C. Wesley," vol. ii., p. 302.

> "In his 'Checks to Antinomianism,'" wrote Wesley, "one knows not which to admire most—the *purity* of the language, the *strength* and *clearness* of the argument, or the *mildness* and *sweetness* of the spirit that breathes throughout the whole. Insomuch that I nothing wonder at a serious clergyman, who being resolved to live and die in his own opinion, when he was pressed to read them replied, 'No, I will never read Mr. Fletcher's "Checks," for if I did, I should be of his mind.'"[1]

Of course, contrary opinions have been expressed. The author of "The Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon" tells his readers that,—

> "Fletcher dazzled with eloquence instead of reasoning, and substituted tropes for arguments. He was too loquacious for a deep reasoner, and too impassioned to investigate duly the most profound and awful themes which can occupy the human understanding."

Isaac Taylor, also, in his "Wesley and Methodism," takes the same position. He acknowledges that,—

> "In a genuine sense, Fletcher was a saint; a saint such as the Church of every age has produced a few samples. Sanctity and purity of manners were his distinctive characteristics. He was as unearthly a being as could tread the earth at all; and his Methodism was Christianity as little lowered by admixture of human infirmity as we may hope to find it anywhere on earth." But while "as a theologian he possessed acquaintance enough with doctrinal literature and with the Scriptures to give him always a point or two of advantage in relation to his antagonists, he was no such reasoner, he was no such master of Biblical criticism, as might have made it possible for him to overstep the limits of his appointed task, or, as a theological writer, to survive his day."[2]

The first of these critics was too much of a Calvinist to do justice to Fletcher, an Arminian; and it is not rash to say respecting the second, that it is extremely doubtful whether he had carefully perused the writings he condemns. At all events, his assertion that "as a theological writer" Fletcher did not "survive his day," is utterly untrue. Fletcher's "Checks" are as much read to-day as they were a hundred years ago. The demand for them increases almost every year, both in England and in America; and they are found in every land where Methodism has been founded. At the time when they were first published, they occasioned exasperation among the Calvinian Methodists, but that was not the fault of their distinguished author. What was called "bitterness" in Fletcher was not bitterness of temper, but "of unwelcome doctrine, set forth with all the advantages of language, confidence, and argument." Soon after they were completed, a Dissenting minister at Bristol called upon Fletcher, when, to all human appearance, he was dying, and rudely said, "You had better have been confined to your bed by palsy than have written so many bitter things against the dear children of God." "My brother," replied the invalid, "I hope I have not been bitter. Certainly I did not mean to be so; but I wanted more love then, and I feel I want more now."[1] Fletcher's soft answer silenced his sour assailant, and sent him away, it is to be hoped, a wiser and better man.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Robert Southey wrote, "Mr. Fletcher's manner is diffuse, and the florid parts and the unction betray their French origin; but the reasoning is acute and clear, the spirit of his writings is beautiful, and he was a master of the subject in all its bearings."

It is a pleasant fact to put on record that Fletcher and his opponents in the Calvinian controversy lived long enough to be affectionately reconciled to each other. Shirley, the first in the field, had, at least, one brotherly interview with Fletcher, in Ireland.[2] In the Methodist Museum at the Centenary Hall, London, there is an unpublished letter, which Mr. Richard Hill wrote to Fletcher in 1784, full of Christian affection. Rowland Hill, with admirable candour, said of his own writings, "A softer style and spirit would better have become me;" and he also suppressed the sale of one of his severest publications.[3] Then as it respects dear old Berridge at Everton, it will be seen, in a succeeding chapter, that he and Fletcher were more than reconciled to each other. Their meeting at Everton, in the month of December, 1776, is one of the most charming incidents recorded in Methodistic annals.

Another name must be introduced. Dr. Thomas Coke was now twenty-eight years of age. He had taken his degrees at Oxford, had received episcopal ordination, and was now curate at South Petherton. As yet, he had not been introduced to Wesley; but he had read his sermons and journals, and also the "Checks" of Fletcher,—all kindly lent to him by the Rev. Mr. Brown, a clergyman residing in the neighbourhood of Taunton. A year elapsed before Wesley met him, but in the meantime, the young curate wrote the following letter[1] to Fletcher:—

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1823, p. 107.
[2] Stevens's "History of Methodism."
[3] Sidney's "Life of Rev. Rowland Hill."

"SOUTH PETHERTON, NEAR CREWKERNE, SOMERSET,
"*August* 28, 1775.

"REV. SIR,—I take the liberty, though unknown to you, but not unacquainted with your admirable publications, of writing you a letter of sincerest thanks for the spiritual instruction, as well as entertainment, they have afforded me; and for the spirit of candour and Christian charity which breathes throughout your writings. The charming character which my best of earthly friends (the Rev. Mr. Brown, of Kingston, near Taunton), has given me of you, emboldens me to hope that, though my situation in life be only that of a poor curate of a parish, you will excuse this liberty I have taken of addressing you in the fulness of my heart.

"You are indubitably, Sir, a sincere friend of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I also am an humble admirer of the blessed Jesus, and it is on that foundation only I would wish, and it is on that only I am sure I can recommend myself to you.

"Your excellent 'Checks to Antinomianism' have riveted me in an abhorrence and detestation of the peculiar tenets of Calvin, and the monstrous errors into which those great and good men, Bishops Hopkins and Beveridge, have run, have frequently filled me with wonder.

"Your 'Essay on Truth' has been more particularly blessed to me. Your 'Scripture Scales' I am just going to read with great attention. Many thanks to you for your treatise on the 'Fallen State of Man.' It has been of service to me, and of much more, I have reason to think, to many of my congregation.

"O, Sir, I have frequently prayed to my God that He will make you a great pillar of His Church. In return, I do humbly beg that you will pray for me. I am sure you will grant me the favour when I inform you that (as nearly as I can guess) a thousand or more immortal souls come to me on every Lord's Day, in the afternoon, to receive their portion of the manna of the Word, the bread of everlasting life.

"I will so far transgress against the public and your dear flock as to request an answer. I am almost afraid to hope for more. May the God who loves you, and whom you love, make you a great instrument of His glory in this life, and grant you the height of your ambition in the next.

"I am, Rev. Sir, with great respect, your much obliged and very humble servant,

"THOMAS COKE."

---

[1] The letter is copied, verbatim, from the *original*, in the Wesleyan Mission House collection, Bishopsgate Street, London.

Little, at this time, did the obscure Dr. Coke imagine that, eight years afterwards, Fletcher would be one of the first twenty-six subscribers to the Methodist "Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen," which Coke and a few of his friends then instituted.

One more fact respecting the "Checks to Antinomianism" must be added. The Rev. Thomas Jackson, a good authority, remarks :—

> "Mr. Charles Wesley took a lively interest in the rise and progress of this" [the Calvinian] "controversy, though his name has rarely been connected with it. He corresponded with his friend, the Vicar of Madeley, and encouraged him in his arduous undertaking. Mr. Fletcher transmitted his manuscripts to him for revision, begging of him to expunge every expression that was calculated to give unnecessary pain, and to pay especial attention to the grammar and theology of the whole. He also confided to Mr. Charles Wesley the task of conducting them through the press, the correction of which was inconvenient to himself, because of his distance from London. The fact is, that nearly everything that Mr. Fletcher published, not even excepting his political tracts and his treatise on original sin, passed under the eye and hand of Mr. Charles Wesley before it was given to the world. Not that the compositions of his friend needed much emendation, but his criticisms gave Mr. Fletcher confidence, and were highly valued. In 1775, Mr. Fletcher said to him, 'Nobody helps me but you; and you know how little you do it. Deprive me not of that little. Your every hint is a blessing to me.'"[1]

A letter to Charles Wesley will fitly close the present chapter.

"MADELEY, *December* 4, 1775.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—I see the end of my controversial race, and I have such courage to finish it, that I think it my *bounden* duty to run and strike my blow, and fire my gun, before the water of discouragement has quite wetted the powder of my activity. This makes me seem to neglect my dearest correspondents.

"Old age comes faster upon me than upon you. I am already so grey-headed, that I wrote to my brother to know if I am not fifty-six instead of forty-six. The wheel of time moves so rapidly, that I seem to be in a new element; and yet, praised be God! my strength is preserved far better than I could expect. I came home last night at eleven o'clock tolerably well, after reading prayers and preaching twice and giving the sacrament in my own church, and preaching again and meeting a few people in Society at the next market-town.

---

[1] Jackson's "Life of C. Wesley," vol. ii., p. 294.

"The Lord is wonderfully gracious to me, and, what is more to me than many favours, He helps me to see His mercies in a clearer light. In years past, I did not dare to be thankful for mercies, which now make me *shout for joy*. I had been taught to call them *common mercies*, and I made as little of them as apostates do of the blood of Christ, when they call it a *common thing*. But now the veil begins to rend, and I invite you and all the world to praise God for His patience, truth, and lovingkindness, which have followed me all my days. O how I hate the delusion, which has robbed me of so many comforts!

"Farewell! I am, etc.,
"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 226.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PUBLICATIONS IN THE YEAR 1776.

EXCEPT his posthumous works, the remainder of Fletcher's writings were issued during the next two years, 1776 and 1777. These will be briefly noticed in the present chapter. During the last four years, his antagonists had been Walter Shirley, Richard Hill, Rowland Hill, and John Berridge. Now he encountered three others—Augustus Montague Toplady, the well-known Vicar of Broad Hembury, in Devonshire; Caleb Evans, an eminent Baptist minister at Bristol; and, in connection with Mr. Evans, the celebrated Rev. Richard Price, D.D., an Arian minister, at Hackney, London.

Methodist readers are so familiar with the life and character of Toplady, as to render it unnecessary to refer to them in the present pages. Suffice it to say, that this remarkable and strangely constituted man seems to have been almost as much prejudiced against Fletcher as he was against Wesley. "I was lately asked," said he, "what my opinion is of Mr. John Fletcher's writings. My answer was, that, in the very few pages I had perused, the *serious* passages were dulness double condensed; and the *lighter* passages, impudence double distilled."[1]

In 1770, Wesley published his tract, entitled, "The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted." This was a faithful abridgment of Toplady's translation of Zanchius's once famous book,[2] and concluded with the well-known paragraph:—

---

[1] Toplady's "Posthumous Works," 1780, p. 234.

[2] Toplady's Translation was published at the end of the year 1769.

> "The sum of all is this: one in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will; the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader, believe this, or be damned. Witness my hand,
>
> "A—— T——."

Toplady was terribly enraged, and immediately published "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley: relative to his pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination." In 1771, Wesley replied to this, in his tract entitled, "The Consequence Proved,"—the object of which was to establish the paragraph which had occasioned Toplady such huge offence. A year later, Toplady published his "More Work for Mr. John Wesley; or, A Vindication of the Decrees and Providence of God from the Defamation of a late printed paper, entitled, 'The Consequence Proved.'" Wesley had no time and no inclination to continue the controversy; but handed over the angry Vicar of Broad Hembury to the tender mercies of Thomas Olivers and Fletcher. Olivers' tart pamphlet need not be further mentioned; but, in reference to Fletcher, it may be added, that, in a letter to Mr. Richard Hill, dated "March 12, 1773," Toplady wrote:—

> "I am told that Mr. Fletcher has it in contemplation to make an attack on *me* too. He is welcome. I am ready for him. Nor shall I, in that case, altogether imitate the examples of yourself and your brother; unless Mr. Fletcher should treat me with more decency than he has, hitherto, observed towards others. Tenderness, 'tis very evident, has no effect on Mr. Wesley and his pretended *family of love*. Witness the rancour with which Mr. Hervey's[1] memory and works are treated by that lovely family. For my own part, I shall never attempt to hew such millstones with a feather. They must be served as nettles; press them close, and they cannot sting. Yet have they my prayers and my best wishes for their present and future salvation. But not one hair's breadth of the Gospel will I ever offer at their shrine, or sacrifice to their idol."[2]

Toplady's information that Fletcher intended to "attack" him was quite correct; but, for the present, Fletcher was so occupied with his "Checks to Antinomianism," that two years elapsed before he could devote attention to his new antagonist.

---

[1] The well-known Rev. James Hervey.

[2] Toplady's "Posthumous Works," 1780, p. 343.

Toplady had no need to tell Mr. Richard Hill, in 1773, that, in any future replies he might make to the attacks of Wesley, Fletcher, or their friends, he would not be sparing in the language that he used; for, in his "Letter" to Wesley in 1770, and his "More Work for Wesley" in 1772, he had employed abuse which is, perhaps, unparalleled in religious literature, and for which it is difficult to account. Wesley was charged, by this young man of thirty years, with using "all the sophistry of a Jesuit, and the dictatorial authority of a pope." He had descended to his "customary resource of false quotations, despicable invective, and unsupported dogmatisms." His "phraseology" was "as pregnant with craft as his conduct" was "destitute of honour." "By his deep-laid, but soon detected, cunning,—by his avowed vacuity of candour, truth, and shame, he has, in the general estimation of all unprejudiced people, gotten a wound and dishonour and reproach which all his whining and winding sophistry will never be able to wipe away." "Perversion and falsification are essential figures in this man's rhetoric." "Unless God give Mr. Wesley repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, the unparalleled perverseness with which he labours to blacken some doctrines of Christianity will be the burden of his soul in the hour of death and in the day of judgment."

These are really mild—*very mild*—specimens of Toplady's unaccountable abuse of Wesley. How the same man could write, "Rock of ages, cleft for me," and other hymns quite as exquisite, it is difficult to conceive.

Fletcher's long-expected reply was published in 1776, with the following title-page, "An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Vindication of the Decrees,' etc. By the Author of the Checks. London: Printed in the year 1776." 12mo, 133 pp.

Fletcher disposes of Toplady's abusive language in his "Introduction." He writes:—

"If Mr. Toplady, in his controversial heat, has forgotten what he owed to Mr. Wesley and to himself, this is no reason why I should forget the title of my book, which calls me to point out the bad arguments of our opponents, and not their ill humour. If I absurdly spent my time in passing a censure upon Mr. Toplady's spirit, he would, with reason, say, as he does in the introduction to his 'Historical Proof,'[1] page 35, 'What has my pride or my humility to do with the argument in hand? Whether I am haughty or meek, is of no more consequence either to that, or to the public, than whether I am tall or short.' Besides, having, again and again, myself requested our opponents not to wiredraw the controversy by personal reflections, but to weigh with candour the arguments which are offered, I should be inexcusable if I did not set them the example. Should it be said that Mr. Wesley's character, which Mr. Toplady has so severely attacked, is at stake, and that I ought purposely to stand up in his defence; I reply, that the personal charges which Mr. Toplady interweaves with his arguments have been already fully answered by Mr. Olivers;[2] and that these charges being chiefly founded upon Mr. Toplady's logical mistakes, they will, of their own accord, fall to the ground, as soon as the mistakes on which they rest shall be exposed. May the God of truth and love grant, that, if Mr. Toplady has the honour of producing the best arguments, I, for one, may have the advantage of yielding to them! To be conquered by truth and love, is to prove conqueror over our two greatest enemies,—error and sin."

What a contrast between Fletcher and Toplady! Both were men of genius; both were scholars; both were clergymen of the Church of England; both were polemics; but one was meek in heart—the other just the opposite; one was a gentleman—the other, notwithstanding his ability and eloquence, was a traducer.

As already stated, the short paragraph which Wesley appended to his abridgment of Toplady's translation of Zanchius's "Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted" infuriated the Vicar of Broad Hembury to an almost incredible degree. Toplady employed, what Fletcher calls, seventy-three "*arguments*," but which might more correctly be called *dogmatisms*, in replying to Wesley's exposure of Calvinian predestination. Fletcher, in his "*Answer*," deals with these, one by one, seriatim. Toplady was overmatched, and his "arguments" were shown to be fallacies. Throughout his able book, Fletcher never loses his temper, and never indulges in vituperation. The strongest language he uses is found in his concluding paragraphs, as follows:—

---

[1] Toplady's "Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England;" published, in two volumes, in 1774.

[2] In "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Toplady, occasioned by his late Letter to Mr. Wesley. By Thomas Olivers, 1771." 12mo, 60 pp.

"I humbly hope that I have, in the preceding pages, contended for the truth of the Gospel, and the honour of God's perfections. My conscience bears me witness, that I have endeavoured to do it with the sincerity of a candid inquirer after truth; and that I have not, knowingly, leaped over one material difficulty which Mr. Toplady has thrown in the way of the laborious divine whose evangelical principles I vindicate. And now, judicious reader, if I have done my part as a detecter of the fallacies by which the modern doctrines of grace are 'kept upon their legs,' let me prevail upon thee to do thy part as a judge, and to say if the right leg of Calvinism, that is, the lawless election of an unscriptural grace, so draws thy admiration as to make thee overlook the deformity of the left leg, that is, the absurd, unholy, sin-ensuring, hell-procuring, merciless, and unjust reprobation which Mr. Toplady has attempted to vindicate. Shall thy reason, thy conscience, thy feelings, thy Bible, and, what is more than this, shall all the perfections of thy God, and the veracity of thy Saviour, be sacrificed on the altar of a reprobation which none of the prophets, apostles, and early fathers ever heard of?—a barbarous reprobation which heated Augustine drew from the horrible error of Manichean necessity, and clothed with some Scripture expressions detached from the context, and wrested from their original meaning?—a Pharisaic reprobation, which the Church of Rome took from him, and which some of our reformers unhappily brought from that corrupted Society into the Protestant Churches?—in a word, a reprobation which disgraces Christianity, when that holy religion is considered as a system of evangelical doctrine, as much as our most enormous crimes disgrace it, when it is considered as a system of pure morality? Shall such a reprobation, I say, find a place in thy creed? yea, among thy doctrines of grace? God forbid!

"I hope better things of thy candour, good sense, and piety. If prejudice, human authority, and voluntary humility, seduce many good men into a profound reverence for that stupendous dogma, be not carried away by their number, or biassed by their shouts. Be not afraid to 'be pilloried in a preface, flogged at a pamphlet's tail,' and treated as a knave, a felon, or a blasphemer through the whole of the next vindication of the deified[1] decrees, which are commonly called 'Calvinism.' This may be thy lot, if thou darest to bear thy plain testimony against the Antinomian idol of the day."

Fletcher's conflict with Toplady was continued. Hence the following "Advertisement," affixed to the *first edition* of the book just dismissed:—

"Since these sheets have been prepared for the press, I have seen a new performance of Mr. Toplady, in defence of the doctrine which is exposed in the preceding pages. As there are, in that piece, some *new*

---

[1] "Mr. Toplady calls them 'the decrees of God;' and it is an axiom among the Calvinists, that 'God's decrees are God Himself.'"

> arguments, the plausibility of which may puzzle many readers; and as I think it my duty *fully* to vindicate the truth, and *completely* to detect error; I design to answer that book also, in a little tract, which will be a supplement to this, and which will probably see the light under the following title, 'A Reply to the Principal Arguments by which the Calvinists and the Fatalists Support the Spreading Doctrine of *Absolute Necessity.* In some Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Scheme of Philosophical Necessity.'''

To understand this, it must be stated, that, in 1774, Wesley published a 12mo pamphlet of 33 pages, entitled, "Thoughts upon Necessity." This was one of Wesley's ablest publications, and, to use Wesley's own words, in his address "to the Reader," it was meant to rebut the teaching of an "Essay on Liberty and Necessity,"[1] which he had lately read. "I would fain," says he, "place mankind in a fairer point of view than that writer" (the author) "has done: as I cannot believe the noblest creature in the visible world to be only a fine piece of clock-work." Toplady was not once mentioned in Wesley's tract; but he immediately set to work to answer it, and, in the following year, his strange production was issued with the following title: "The Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity Asserted. In Opposition to Mr. John Wesley's Tract on that Subject. With a Dissertation concerning the Sensible Qualitys of Matter: and the Doctrine of Color in particular. By Augustus Toplady, Vicar of Broad Hembury. London, 1775." 8vo, 216 pp.

Wesley, as already stated, had not even named Toplady in his publication, much less abused him; but the opportunity of again reviling Wesley was too tempting to be neglected. In his preface, he gives an extract from a letter, written by a London clergyman, who had sent him Wesley's tract:—

> "I went last night to the Foundery, expecting to hear Pope *John;* but was disappointed. After hearing a Welshman,[2] for an hour and twenty minutes, on Psalm lxxxiv. 11, preach up all the heresies (*sic*) of the place, a man, who sat in the pulpit, told him to '*Give over:*' for he seemed to bid fair for another half hour, at least. But he came to a conclusion, as desired. Then this man, who seemed to be a local

---

[1] This Essay had been published, in Edinburgh, some years before.
[2] Query? Thomas Olivers, corrector of the press for Wesley.

preacher,[1] stood up with a pamphlet in his hand, and addressed the auditory in the following manner:—

"'I am desired to publish a pamphlet upon *Necessity* and *Free-Will*,—the best I know of in the English tongue,—by *Mr. John Wesley*, price *threepence*. I had purposed to say a *good deal* upon it; but the *time* is elapsed. But, in this threepenny pamphlet, you have *all* the disputes that have been bandy'd about so lately; and you will get your minds more established by *this threepenny* pamphlet, than by reading *all* the books that have been written for and against. It is to be had at both doors, as you go out.'"

It is not unlikely that this narration is true; for, in those days, Methodist preachers preached long sermons, and, from the pulpit, recommended the people to purchase Methodist publications. Toplady takes occasion to call the occurrence "a droll sort of mountebank scene," and pretends to bewail "the unreasonable and unseasonable prolixity of the long-winded holder-forth, which cruelly, injudiciously, and despitefully prevented poor *Zany* from puffing off, with the amplitude he intended, the multiplex virtues of the doctor's threepenny free-will powder." He continues:—

"'*Never do that by delegation*,' says an old proverb, '*which you can as well do in propria persona*. Had Doctor John himself got upon the stage, and sung—

"'Come, buy my fine powders; come buy dem of me;
Hare be de best powders dat ever you see:'

who knows, but the threepenny doses might have gone off '*at both doors*,' as rapidly as peas from a pop-gun?"

Toplady, in a bantering tone, proceeds to give the "*chief ingredients of the famous Moorfields powder*," namely:—

"An equal portion of gross *Heathenism*, *Mahometism*, *Popery*, *Manichaeism*, *Ranterism*, and *Antinomianism;* cull'd, dry'd, and pulveriz'd, *secundem artem:* and, above all, mingled with as much palpable *Atheism* as you can possibly scrape together from every quarter." (Preface.)

In Chapter I., Toplady continues this unworthy, dishonourable abuse. He writes:—

"*Aliquis in omnibus, nullus in singulis*. The man, who concerns himself in everything, bids fair not to make a figure in anything. Mr.

---

[1] Query? John Atlay, the book-steward.

John Wesley is, precisely, this *aliquis in omnibus;* for, is there a single subject in which he has not endeavoured to shine? He is also, as precisely, a *nullus in singulis;* for, has he shone in any one subject which he ever attempted to handle? Upon what principle can these two circumstances be accounted for? Only upon that very principle, at which he so dolefully shakes his head, viz., the principle of *necessity*. The poor gentleman is, *necessarily*, an universal meddler; and, as *necessarily*, an universal miscarryer. Can he *avoid* being either the one or the other? No." (p. 10.)

In a subsequent page, Toplady asserts:—

"Mr. Wesley, in one respect, is *as much*, and, in another respect, *abundantly more* a *Manichae*, than either Scythian, Budda, or Manes. By a very singular mixture of *Manichaeism*, *Pelagianism*, *Popery*, *Socinianism*, *Ranterism*, and *Atheism*, he has, I believe, now got to his ultimatum. Probably, he would go still further, if he could. But, I really think, he has no farther to go. Happy settlement, after forty years' infinity of shiftings and flittings hither and thither!

"'Thus weathercocks, which, for awhile,
Have turn'd about with every blast,—
Grown old, and destitute of oil,
Rust to a point, and fix at last!'" (p. 131.)

Again, on page 168, Toplady's reader is told that—

"Mr. Wesley is the lamest, the blindest, and the most self-contradictory waster of ink and paper, that ever pretended to the name of reasoner. 'Tis almost a disgrace to refute him."

Again, on p. 172, Toplady writes:—

"Mr. Wesley's heat and prophaneness are such, that he dares to scold his Maker with as little ceremony, and with as much scurrility, as an enraged fish-woman would be-din the ears of a 'prentice wench."

Was Toplady a *Christian?* It is difficult to answer that question. A more monstrous combination of opposing qualities has seldom figured on the stage of human life. He was now thirty-four years of age.[1] Three years and a-half later he was dead.

It is needless to furnish an outline of Toplady's bold book. What he attempted to expound and prove will be found in the following extracts:—

---

[1] Wesley was more than seventy!

> "I own myself very fond of *definitions*. I therefore præmise[1] *what* the *necessity* is, whose cause I have undertaken to plead. I would define necessity to be *that, by which, whatever comes to pass cannot but* come *to pass* (all circumstances taken into the account); *and can come to pass* in *no other way or manner* than it does" (p. 12).

Again, on page 157, he writes:—

> "For my own part, I solemnly profess, before God, angels, and men, that I am *not conscious* of my being endued with that self-determining power, which Arminianism ascribes to me as an individual of the human species. Nay, I am *clearly certain* that I have it not. I am also equally certain that I *do not wish* to have it; and that, were it possible for my Creator to make me an offer of transferring the determination of any one event, from His own will to mine, it would be both my duty and my wisdom to entreat that the sceptre might still remain with Himself, and that I might have nothing to do in the direction of a single incident, or of so much as a single circumstance."

The principles wrapped up in the definition and the confession of Toplady are what he tries to vindicate; and to refute them was the task Fletcher undertook. Fletcher's pamphlet was published in 1777, with the following title: "A Reply to the Principal Arguments by which the Calvinists and Fatalists support the Doctrine of Absolute Necessity: being Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity.' By John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. London, 1777." 12mo, 80 pp.

Fletcher, with his talent of quiet cutting irony, might have rebuked the slang of Toplady; but, like a Christian and a gentleman, he, with indignant silence, allows it to pass unnoticed. The task of vanquishing Toplady was not difficult, for seldom has a more absurd theological work than "The Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity" been committed to the press. Fletcher's "reply" was perfectly unanswerable: poor Toplady was silenced.

It would tire the reader to analyse Fletcher's work; and two extracts from it must suffice, the first showing with what ease Fletcher dealt with the absurdities of Toplady's philosophy; and the second exhibiting his desire to live in peace and love with even the rabid Calvinists.

---

[1] In this, and in all the foregoing extracts, the spelling of words is *literally* given.—L. T.

In Chapter III. of his book, Toplady wrote as follows:—

> "It seems most agreeable to the radical simplicity, which God has observed in all His works, to suppose, that, *in themselves*, all human souls are *equal*. I can easily believe, that the soul of an oyster-woman has, naturally, the unexpanded powers of Grotius, or of Sir Isaac Newton; and that what conduces to raise the philosopher, the poet, the politician, or the linguist, so much above the ignorant and stupid of mankind, is, not only the circumstance of intellectual cultivation, but, still more than that, his having the happiness to occupy a better house, *i.e.* a *body* more commodiously *organized* than they. The soul of a *Monthly Reviewer*, if imprisoned within the same mud walls which are tenanted by the soul of *Mr. John Wesley*, would, similarly circumstanced, reason and act, I verily think, exactly like the Bishop of Moorfields. And I know some very sensible people, who even go so far as to suppose, that, were a human soul shut up in the skull of a *cat*, puss would, notwithstanding, move prone on all fours, purr when stroked, spit when pinched, and birds and mice would be her darling objects of pursuit. Though I cannot carry matters to so extreme a length as this, yet, I repeat my opinion, very much depends on corporeal organization.
>
> "I just now hinted the conjecture of some that a human spirit, incarcerated in the brain of a cat, would, probably, both think and behave as that animal now does. But how would the soul of a cat acquit itself, if enclosed in the brain of a man? We cannot resolve this question with *certainty*, any more than the other. We may, however, even on *this* occasion, address every one of our human brethren in the words of that great philosophic necessitarian, St. Paul, and ask, *Who maketh thee to differ* from the lowest of the brute creation? Thy *Maker's* free will, not thine. *And what* pre-eminence *hast thou, which thou didst* not *receive* from Him? Not the least, nor the shadow of any."

"Admirable divinity!" wrote Fletcher. "So Mr. Toplady leaves the orthodox in doubt,—1. Whether, when their souls and the souls of cats shall be let out of their respective brains or prisons, the souls of cats will not be equal to the souls of men. 2. Whether, supposing the soul of a cat had been put in the brain of St. Paul, or of a Monthly Reviewer, the soul of puss would not have made as great an Apostle as the soul of Saul of Tarsus; as good a critic as the soul of the most sensible Reviewer. And, 3. Whether, in case the 'human spirit' of Isaiah 'was shut up in the skull of a cat, puss would not, notwithstanding, move prone on all fours, purr when stroked, spit when pinched, and birds and mice be her darling objects of pursuit.' Is not this a pretty large stride, for the first, towards the doctrine of the sameness of the souls of men with the souls of cats and frogs? Wretched Calvinism, new-fangled doctrines of grace, where are you leading your deluded admirers, your principal vindicators? Is it not enough, that you have spoiled the fountain of living waters, by turning into it the muddy streams of *Zeno's* errors? Are ye also going to poison it by the absurdities of *Pythagoras's* philosophy? What a side-stroke is here inadvertently given to these capital doctrines, 'God breathed into' Adam 'the breath of life, and he became a living soul;' a soul made 'in the image of God,' and not in the image of a cat! 'The spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth; but the spirit of man goeth upward; it returns to God who gave it,' with an intention to judge and reward it according to its moral works.

"But I must do Mr. Toplady justice; he does not yet recommend this doctrine as absolutely certain. However, from his capital doctrine, that human souls have no free-will, no inward principle of self-determination; and from his avowed opinion, that the soul of one man, placed in the body of another man, 'would, similarly circumstanced, reason and act exactly like' the man in whose *mud walls* it is lodged; it evidently follows, 1. That, had the human soul of Christ been placed in the body and circumstances of *Nero*, it would have been exactly as wicked and atrocious as the soul of that bloody monster was. And 2. That if Nero's soul had been placed in Christ's body, and in His trying circumstances, it would have been exactly as virtuous and immaculate as that of the Redeemer; the consequence is undeniable. Thus, the merit of the man Christ did not, in the least, spring from His righteous soul, but from His '*mud walls*,' and from the happiness which His soul had of being lodged in a '*brain peculiarly modified*.' Nor did the demerit of Nero flow from his free agency and self-perversion, but only from his '*mud walls*,' and from the infelicity which his necessitated soul had of being lodged in '*an ill-constructed vehicle*,'' and placed on that throne on which Titus soon after deserved to be called 'the darling of mankind.' See, O ye engrossers of orthodoxy, to what absurd lengths your aversion to the liberty of the will, and to evangelical worthiness, leads your unwary souls! And yet, if we believe Mr. Toplady, your scheme, which is big with these inevitable consequences, is 'Christian philosophy,' and our doctrine of free will is 'philosophy run mad,' p. 30."

Did cat ever play with mouse more perfectly and amusingly than did the Vicar of Madeley with the Vicar of Broad Hembury?

The next extract, which is the conclusion of Fletcher's triumphant "Reply" to Toplady, shows his intense desire to live in love and peace with his opponents:—

"Mr. Wesley and I are ready to testify upon oath, that we humbly submit to God's sovereignty, and joyfully glory in the freeness of Gospel grace, which has mercifully distinguished us from countless myriads of our fellow-creatures, by gratuitously bestowing upon us numberless favours, of a spiritual and temporal nature, which he has thought proper absolutely to withhold from our fellow-creatures. To meet the Calvinists on their own ground, we go so far as to allow there is a partial, gratuitous election and reprobation. By this election, Christians are admitted to the enjoyment of privileges far superior to those of the Jews; and, according to this reprobation, myriads of heathen are absolutely cut off from all the prerogatives which accompany God's covenants of peculiar grace. In a word, we grant to the Calvinists everything they contend for, except the doctrine of *absolute necessity;* nay, we even grant the necessary, unavoidable salvation of all that die in their infancy. And our love of peace would make us go farther to meet Mr. Toplady, if we could do it without giving up the justice, mercy, truth, and wisdom of God, together with the truth of the Scriptures, the equity of God's paradisaical and mediatorial laws, the propriety of the day of judgment, and the reasonableness of the sentences of absolution and condemnation, which the Righteous Judge will then pronounce. We hope, therefore, that the prejudices of our Calvinian brethren will subside; and that, instead of accounting us inveterate enemies to truth, they will do us the justice to say, that we have done our best to hinder them from inadvertently betraying some of the greatest truths of Christianity into the hands of the Manichees, Materialists, Infidels, and Antinomians of the age. May the Lord hasten the happy day in which we shall no more waste our precious time in attacking or defending the truths of our holy religion; but bestow every moment in the sweet exercises of Divine and brotherly love!"

During the last six years, Fletcher had most laboriously devoted the whole of the time he could conscientiously spare from the faithful discharge of his parochial duties, to an earnest and elaborate explanation and defence of the Anti-Calvinian doctrines, formally announced by his friend Wesley, at the Conference of 1770. Wesley was without leisure for this. If he had attempted it, he would have been obliged to content himself with the publication of brief, sententious tracts; and this would have been insufficient. Most of the Methodist clergymen of the day, including Whitefield, Hervey, Romaine, Berridge, Shirley, Toplady, and many others, had become sincere and laborious Calvinists. Their publications were widely spread, and their views extensively embraced. Wesley saw and felt that an antidote was needed; and especially as the Countess of Huntingdon had recently opened her college at Trevecca to multiply the number of such ministers. Hence, the declaration of his "Minutes," and hence, the fierce controversial war that immediately followed. Fletcher had been educated at Geneva, where Calvin had propounded his creed, and his form of Church government. Fletcher was not, professedly, a theological student at Geneva; but he was a regular attendant at Divine services, as well as a diligent reader of the Holy Scriptures, and there can be no doubt that he was, to a considerable extent, even in his youth, acquainted with the Calvinian theology. At all events, when the controversy commenced, in 1770, there was no one, among Wesley's helpers, so competent to enter the arena, on his behalf, as his friend Fletcher. Hitherto, Fletcher had been accustomed to make little evangelistic tours, to London, to Wales, and to other places; but now, for six years, he confined himself within his own parish, that he might have time to defend Wesley. Up to the present, his letters to his friends had been somewhat numerous; now, to write a letter was one of his rare exercises. He was committed to a great work; and everything, excepting the pastoral duties of his parish, must give way to it. Of the style of his writings, the reader has had numerous specimens. It is always perspicuous, lively, chaste, though occasionally prolix. Many of his figures are apt, striking, convincing; but others would have been more impressive had they been less elaborate. His arguments are fair, legitimate, and generally unanswerable. His spirit, without exception, is saintly. He never becomes personal; never deals in invective; never assails character; never impugns motives. Among the Wesleyan Methodists, he settled for ever all the questions of the Calvinian controversy. For many a long year, Methodist preachers—itinerant and local—drew their arguments and illustrations from his invaluable "Checks;" and, perhaps, it is not too much to say, that not a few of the Calvinists themselves were led by his immortal productions to explain, and modify, and, to some extent, to change their unwarrantable doctrines. To his memory, the Methodist Churches owe undying veneration; for he did for Wesley's theology what no other man than himself, at that period, could have done. John Wesley travelled, formed Societies, and governed them. Charles Wesley composed unequalled hymns for the Methodists to sing; and John Fletcher, a native of Calvinian Switzerland, explained, elaborated, and defended the doctrines they heartily believed.

Hitherto, his opponents had been Walter Shirley, Richard Hill and his brother Rowland, honest Berridge, and clever but censorious Toplady. The last, for invective, was the worst. Twenty years before, he had heard James Morris, one of Wesley's itinerants, preach in a barn at Codymain, and soon afterwards was converted. Two years later, while a student in Trinity College, Dublin, he wrote an admirable letter to Wesley, thanking him for his "kind" cautions and advices. When and why he became the bitter foe of Wesley it is difficult to determine. He died on August 11, 1778, in the thirty-eighth year of his age, and was buried in a grave, thirteen feet deep, under the gallery of Whitefield's chapel, in Tottenham Court Road.

Fletcher's next antagonist was the Rev. Caleb Evans, a Baptist minister at Bristol; a man of good sense, a diligent student, a faithful pastor, and now thirty-seven years of age. At this period, the English colonists in America were in rebellion. On May 10, 1775, a Congress of the thirteen States met at Philadelphia, and appointed George Washington as their Commander-in-Chief. He took command of the army before Boston, where the English had ten thousand men. A few days after his arrival, the terrible battle at Bunker's Hill was fought; and a bloody war soon spread over the whole seaboard, and even into Canada, where the American colonists besieged Quebec. In the year 1775, Wesley abridged Dr. Johnson's famous pamphlet, entitled, "Taxation no Tyranny," and published it as his own, without the least reference as to its origin. Mr. Evans warmly sympathized with the colonists, and published "A Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, occasioned by his 'Calm Address.'" Wesley's reply to this was the republication of his pirated pamphlet, with a preface prefixed, in which he said, "All the arguments" [of Evans] "might be contained in a nutshell." Political as well as theological controversy is always irritating. Angry tracts and pamphlets, almost without number, were committed to the press; but all of them, except those in which Fletcher was concerned, must here be passed in silence. Fletcher now, strangely enough, turned politician. Early in the year 1776, he published the following: "A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to our American Colonists:' In some Letters to Mr. Caleb Evans: By John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. London: Printed and sold at the Foundery." 12mo, 70 pp.[1]

In a letter to Joseph Benson, he said :—

> "I have unaccountably launched into Christian politics; a branch of divinity too much neglected by some and too much attended to by others. If you have seen my 'Vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address,' and can make sense of that badly printed piece, I shall be thankful for your very dispraise."

To James Ireland, Esq., he wrote on February 3, 1776 :—

> "My little political piece is published in London. You thank me for it beforehand; I believe they are the only thanks I shall have. It is well you sent them before you read the book; and yet, whatever contempt it brings upon me, I still think I have written the truth. If I have been wrong in writing, I hope I shall not be so excessively wrong as not to be thankful for any reproof candidly levelled at what I have written. I prepare myself to be like my Lord in my little measure; I mean, to be '*Despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs*,'—most reviled for what I mean best."

Evidence will soon be adduced that Fletcher's apprehensions of coming reproach were realized.

It may fairly be doubted whether Wesley and Fletcher acted wisely in rushing into the fierce political strife that then existed. Their motives were pure; and, perhaps, Mr. Benson, living at the time, and a competent observer of men and things, was correct when he said,—

> "Mr. Fletcher's publications upon the question which divided Great Britain and her Colonies, as well as Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address,' certainly were of great use; not indeed to prevent the continuation and further progress of the war, and stop the effusion of blood abroad, but to allay the spirits of disloyalty and insurrection which were beginning to show themselves at home."

Still, it must be admitted, that the high and holy vocation of Wesley and Fletcher was not to rebuke and correct political errors, but to revive, spread, and defend the great Gospel truths which had been so long neglected and forgotten.

No useful end would be answered by giving an outline of Fletcher's arguments in his "Vindication of Wesley's 'Calm

---

[1] In the same year, another edition was published in "Dublin: Printed for W. Whitestone, No. 33, Skinner Row."

Address.'" Many of them may be more easily sneered at than answered. They show the versatility of Fletcher's genius; and, remembering the fewness of the newspapers then published, they create surprise at the extent of Fletcher's political information. He often uses strong language, but he is never ungentlemanly or abusive. He was loyal to the throne and government of England, but he was not a blind opponent of civil liberty, or that exemption from the arbitrary will of others which is secured by equitable and established laws. In concluding his first letter to Mr. Evans he wrote:—

> "I declare that I am as much in love with *liberty* as with *loyalty;* and that I write a heartfelt truth when I subscribe myself, Rev. Sir, your affectionate fellow-labourer in the Gospel, a republican by birth and education, and a subject of Great Britain by love of liberty and free choice."

As soon as Fletcher's pamphlet appeared, Mr. Evans hastened to answer it, and employed Wesley's old friend, William Pine, of Bristol, as his printer and publisher. The title of his new production was "A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's 'Vindication' of Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to our American Colonists.' By Caleb Evans, M.A." 12mo, 103 pp.

Mr. Evans's reply was full of bad temper. The first twenty-three pages were devoted to abusive remarks on the change which had taken place in Wesley's political opinions, and to a mistake which Wesley honestly confessed he had made in denying that he had seen a book on "the exclusive right of the Colonies to tax themselves." He acknowledges that he had seen the book, but adds: "I had so entirely forgotten it, that even when I saw it again I recollected nothing of it till I had read several pages." Mr. Evans, in an angry spirit, uses this lapse of memory to the utmost in an endeavour to brand Wesley as a liar, and concludes his first letter to Fletcher thus:—

> "Having thus given you, Sir, a faithful narrative of the rise, progress, and conclusion of the dispute betwixt me and Mr. Wesley, you are welcome to re-enter on the vindication of *your friend*, as you style him, as soon as you please. And should you find yourself unequal to the *Herculean* task, you may call in the assistance of the amazing Mr. *Thomas Olivers*, that mirror of Christian meekness and modesty, and

with his logic and your oratory, aided by scraps of mutilated letters, you will perform wonders."

Mr. Evans begins his second letter by politely telling Fletcher that in reading his "Vindication of Wesley's 'Calm Address'" he had been greatly disappointed.

> "For," says he, "instead of argument, I met with nothing but declamation; instead of precision, artful colouring; instead of proof, presumption; instead of consistency, contradiction; instead of reasoning, a string of sophistries. Your letters abound, Sir, as every intelligent reader will easily discover, with the *petitio principii*, the *fallacia accidentis*, the *non causa pro causa*, and those many other pretty inventions by which, as the Schoolmen very well know, a question may be embarrassed when it cannot be answered."

In succeeding pages, Mr. Evans charges Fletcher with using "loose, inconsistent, vague declamation;" and adds:—

> "This may confound the ignorant and superficial; but you cannot yourself suppose it ever can convince the intelligent and impartial. Your chief aim seems to be *spargere voces in vulgam ambiguas*, and thereby artfully to persuade them that all those who are enemies to the measures of the ministry respecting America are Republicans, king-haters, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Antinomians, and everything that is bad."

Poor Fletcher! He was indeed realizing the reproach he had apprehended; and yet he was not satisfied. Hence his publication of the following: "American Patriotism: Farther confronted with Reason, Scripture, and the Constitution: Being Observations on the Dangerous Politicks taught by the Rev. Mr. Evans, M.A., and the Rev. Dr. Price.[1] With a Scriptural Plea for the Revolted Colonies. By J. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley." 1776. 12mo, 138 pp.

> "The author," writes Fletcher in his preface, "dares not flatter himself to have the knowledge of logic and divinity, which are requisite to do his subject the justice it deserves; but, having for some years opposed *false orthodoxy*, he may have acquired a little skill to oppose *false patriotism*; and, having defended *evangelical obedience to God* against the indirect attacks of some ministers of the Church of England, he humbly hopes that he may step forth a second time and defend *consti-*

---

[1] Mr. Evans, in his "Reply," had made several quotations from what he calls "Dr. Price's most excellent pamphlet, just published," and entitled, "Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty."

tutional obedience to the king against some ministers who dissent from the Established Church. Those whom he encounters in these sheets are the leading ecclesiastical patriots of the two greatest cities in the kingdom; Mr. Evans being the champion of the minority in Bristol, as Dr. Price is in London."

Of course, Fletcher's book is able; but, excepting so far as it teaches that loyalty is a Christian duty, it is, to a great extent, out of date.

On October 30, 1776, a royal proclamation was issued, ordering "a public fast and humiliation to be observed throughout England and the kingdom of Ireland, upon Friday the 13th of December next, for the purpose of imploring the Almighty speedily to deliver the King's loyal subjects within his colonies and provinces in North America, from the violence, injustice, and tyranny of those daring rebels who had assumed to themselves the exercise of arbitrary power; to open the eyes of those who had been deluded, by specious falsehoods, into acts of treason and rebellion; to turn the hearts of the authors of these calamities; and to restore his people in those distracted provinces and colonies to the happy condition of being free subjects in a free state, under which heretofore they had flourished so long, and prospered so much."[1]

This had Fletcher's hearty approbation, and he at once wrote and published a 12mo pamphlet of 22 pages, dated "London, December 6, 1776," with the title, "The Bible and the Sword; or, The Appointment of the General Fast Vindicated: In an Address to the Common People, concerning the Propriety of Repressing obstinate Licentiousness with the Sword, and of Fasting when the Sword is drawn for that Purpose. London: Printed by R. Hawes, and sold at the Foundery, in Moorfields, and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Preaching Houses in Town and Country. 1776."[2] One half of this pamphlet, however, was simply a reprint of extracts from his "American Patriotism;" the other half is devoted to the task of proving, from Scripture, that, under certain circumstances, war is lawful.

---

[1] Annual Register, 1776.

[2] Almost without exception, all Fletcher's publications had on their title-pages the advertisement, "Sold at the Foundery, in Moorfields, and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's preaching-houses in town and country."

As he expected, Fletcher, by his political publications, brought upon himself political wrath and censure, of which the following extracts, taken from the *Monthly Review*, are specimens :—

> "Mr. Fletcher has been distinguished in the late theological controversies between Mr. Wesley and his followers, on the one part, and the Antinomians, or Calvinists, on the other. In these disputes, the Shropshire vicar made no inconsiderable figure; and we have freely and impartially done justice to his abilities. In *politics*, however, we have nothing to say in his favour. We are, indeed, sorry to observe that he is a mere Sacheverell; a preacher of those slavish and justly exploded Jacobitical doctrines, for which the memory of Sacheverell and his abettors will ever be held in equal contempt and abhorrence by every true friend to the liberties of mankind."[1]
>
> "Mr. Fletcher's present performance" (*American Patriotism*) "is, like his former piece on this subject, wordy, specious, and artful. He alternately attacks the champions on the other side of the question, Dr. Price and Mr. Evans; and he evidently thinks himself a match for them both. We are almost tired of the fruitless contest; but one word with Mr. Fletcher before we part. He is a little chagrined at our styling him a *mere Sacheverell;* and he takes pains, in this publication, to show his equal abhorrence of *regal* or of *mobbish* tyranny. We are glad to find this rev. gentleman thus disclaiming those principles to which many of his positions and arguments obviously lead; and we charitably hope that he was not aware of the full extent and tendency of their operation. Mr. Fletcher is, by all report, a good man; but he will never, we suspect, obtain a *good report* merely for his *politics*, except with those who have already embraced the same system; for mankind are too much guided by Swift's rule of pronouncing those *right* who think as we do, and every one *wrong* who differs from us. Poor encouragement, by the way, for our author to expend his ink, and wear out his pens, in order to convert those political heretics, the advocates for America."[2]

The sneers of the Monthly Reviewers were unjust. Fletcher, in reply to their unmerited taunt, remarked :—

> "I am no more '*a mere Sacheverell*' than I am a *mere Price*. Dr. Sacheverell ran as fiercely into the *high monarchical* extreme as Dr. Price does into the *high republican* extreme. I have endeavoured to keep at an equal distance from their opposite mistakes, by contending only for the just medium, which the Holy Scriptures and our excellent

---

[1] *Monthly Review*, 1776, vol. liv., p. 325.

[2] *Ibid*, 1776, vol. lv, p. 155.

> constitution point out. If Dr. Sacheverell were alive, and his erroneous, enthusiastical, mobbing politics endangered the public tranquillity, as the patriotism of Mr. Evans and Dr. Price does at present, I would oppose the *high churchman* as much as I now do the two *high dissenters*."[1]

Notwithstanding the depreciatory opinions of Mr. Evans, Dr. Price, and the Monthly Reviewers, the government of King George III. desired to reward Fletcher for the service he had rendered them. His old friend, Mr. Vaughan, informed Wesley that he took one of Fletcher's political pamphlets to the Earl of Dartmouth, at that time Secretary of State for the Colonies. Lord Dartmouth carried it to the Lord Chancellor, who handed it to King George. The result was an official was immediately commissioned to ask Fletcher whether any preferment in the Church would be acceptable to him? or whether the Lord Chancellor could do him any service? Fletcher replied, no doubt to the amazement of all concerned, "I want nothing, but more grace."[2]

This was characteristic of the man. "The love of money, the root of all evil," was a sin from which Fletcher was entirely exempt.

> "On the 10th of May, 1774," says Mr. Vaughan, "Mr. Fletcher wrote me thus: 'My brother has sent me the rent of the little place I have abroad, £80, which I was to receive from Mr. Chauvet and Co., in London. But, instead of sending the draught for the money, I have sent it back to Switzerland, with orders to distribute it among the poor. As money is rather higher there than here, that mite will go farther abroad than it would in my parish.' "[3]

Mr. Vaughan continues:—

> "In 1776, he deposited with me a bill of £105, being, as I understood, the yearly produce of his estate in Switzerland. This was his fund for charitable uses; but it lasted only a few months, when he drew upon me for the balance, which was £24, to complete the preaching-house in Madeley Wood."[4]

Men, said Cicero, resemble the gods in nothing so much as in doing good to their fellow-creatures.

---

[1] "American Patriotism," p. 130.
[2] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIX.

CORRESPONDENCE IN 1776.

FLETCHER'S health was failing; and no wonder. Wesley writes:—

> "He was more and more abundant in his ministerial labours, both in public and private; not contenting himself with preaching, but visiting his flock in every corner of his parish. And this work he attended to early and late, whether the weather was fair or foul; regarding neither heat nor cold, rain nor snow, whether he was on horseback or on foot. But this further weakened his constitution; which was still more effectually done by his intense and uninterrupted studies, in which he frequently continued, without scarce any intermission, fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen hours a day. But still he did not allow himself such food as was necessary to sustain nature. He seldom took any regular meals except he had company; otherwise, twice or thrice in four-and-twenty hours he ate some bread and cheese, or fruit. Instead of this, he sometimes took a draught of milk, and then wrote on again. When one reproved him for not affording himself a sufficiency of necessary food, he replied, 'Not allow myself food! Why our food seldom costs my housekeeper and me less than two shillings a week.'" [1]

During the Calvinian controversy, Fletcher's letters to his friends seem to have been comparatively few. At all events, few have been preserved. Now he resumed his epistolary correspondence; and the present chapter will mainly consist of these outpourings of his heart to those whom he dearly loved.

In a letter, dated January 9, 1776, and published in the "Life and Times of Wesley," Fletcher refers to a renewed proposal to become Wesley's successor. To prepare him for this, Wesley requested that he would accompany him in his evangelistic tours, so that he might be commended to the Methodist Societies they visited. Fletcher replied that he was willing to accompany Wesley as a travelling assistant; but he strongly objected to being nominated Wesley's *successor.* Besides other reasons, which he adduced, he remarked, that such a nomination would lead people to suspect, and say, that what he had written, "for truth and conscience' sake," in defence of Wesley's doctrines, had all been done for the purpose of becoming, what Toplady had called, "the Bishop of Moorfields." There is no need to quote this letter at full length; but it is an important one, as showing that the proposal which Wesley had made to Fletcher, three years before, was not a passing whim, but a fixed idea, on the realization of which he had set his heart.[1]

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

It may be added, that Fletcher, in the same letter, informs Wesley, that, by the last post, he had sent him a manuscript, entitled, "A Second Check to Civil Antinomianism;" being an extract from the Church of England Homily on Rebellion; and he expresses the opinion that it might be well to print and circulate it, not only for the general good, but, also, "to shame Mr. Roquet," one of the first masters of Wesley's school, at Kingswood, but now a clergyman of the Church of England, who, in the controversy respecting the American rebellion, had turned against his old friend Wesley, and had rendered assistance to Wesley's dissenting opponent, Caleb Evans. Wesley seems to have had more regard for Mr. Roquet's reputation, than even gentle-minded Fletcher had, for Fletcher's manuscript was not published.

Fletcher refused to be commended as Wesley's successor; but he evidently thought of travelling. Hence, in a letter to his friend James Ireland, Esq., he wrote:—

"Madeley, February 3, 1776. Upon the news of your illness, I and many more prayed that you might be supported under your pressures, and that they might yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We shall now turn our prayers into praises for your happy recovery, and for the support the Lord has granted you under your trial. There are lessons which we can never learn but under the cross: we must suffer with Christ if we will be glorified with Him. I hope you will take care that it may not be said of you, as it was of Hezekiah, 'He rendered not unto the Lord, according to the benefit' of his recovery. May we see the propriety and profit of rendering Him our bodies and our souls,—the sacrifices of humble, praising, obedient love,—and warm, active, cheerful thanksgiving!

---

[1] Others, besides Wesley, had fixed upon Fletcher as Wesley's successor. Joseph Benson, in 1775, shortly after Wesley's dangerous illness in Ireland, wrote to him, saying, "In case of Mr. Wesley's death, your help would be wanted, in the government of the Societies, and in conducting the work of God." To this, Fletcher replied, "God has lately shaken Mr. Wesley over the grave; but, I believe, from the strength of his constitution and the weakness of mine, he will survive me; so that I do not scheme about helping to make up the gap, when that great tree shall fall. Sufficient for the day will that trouble be; nor will the Divine power be then insufficient to help the people in time of need." (Benson's "Life of Fletcher.")

"'A young clergyman offers to assist me: if he does, I may make an excursion somewhere this spring; where it will be, I don't know. It may be into *eternity*, for I dare not depend upon to-morrow; but should it be your way, I shall inform you of a variety of family trials, which the Lord has sent me—all for *good*, to break my will in every possible respect."[1]

In reference to this excursion, Wesley writes:—

"His health being more than ever impaired by a violent cough, accompanied with spitting of blood, I told him, nothing was so likely to restore his health as a long journey. I, therefore, proposed his taking a journey of some months with me, through various parts of England and Scotland; telling him, 'When you are tired, or like it best, you may come into my carriage; but, remember, that riding on horseback is the best of all exercises for *you*, so far as your strength will permit.' He looked upon this as a call from Providence, and very willingly accepted of the proposal. We set out, as I am accustomed to do, early in the spring, and travelled by moderate journeys, suited to his strength, eleven or twelve hundred miles.[2] When we returned to London, in the latter end of the year, he was considerably better; and I verily believe, if he had travelled with me, partly in the chaise and partly on horseback, only a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health."[3]

At this period, the end of 1775, or the beginning of 1776, Joseph Benson was stationed in the circuit of Newcastle-on-Tyne, and to him Fletcher wrote as follows:—

"Though I am pretty well in body, I break fast. I have been put into such pinching, grinding circumstances for near a year, by a series of providential and domestic trials, as have given me some deadly blows. Mr. Wesley kindly invited me some weeks ago to travel with him and visit some of his Societies. The controversy is partly over, and I feel an inclination to break one of my chains,—parochial retirement,—which may be a nest for self. A young minister, in deacon's orders, has offered to be my curate; and, if he can live in this wilderness, I shall have some liberty to leave it. I commit the matter entirely to the Lord.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 227.
[2] I cannot trace this journey.—L.T.
[3] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

"The few professors I see in these parts are so far from what I could wish them and myself to be, that I cannot but cry out, 'Lord, how long wilt Thou give Thine heritage to desolation or barrenness? How long shall the heathen say, where is now their indwelling God?' I hope it is better with you in the north. What are your heart, your pen, your tongue doing? Are they receiving, sealing, spreading the truth everywhere within your sphere? Are you dead to praise or dispraise? Could you quietly pass for a mere fool, and have gross nonsense fathered upon you without any uneasy reflection of self? The Lord bless you! Beware of your grand enemy, earthly wisdom, and unbelieving reasonings. You will never overcome but by childlike, loving simplicity."[1]

Wesley set out, on his "*long journey*," from London, on Sunday evening, March 3, 1776, and reached Bristol two days afterwards. On Wednesday, March 6, he went to Taunton, and "opened the new preaching-house." On Thursday, he returned to Bristol; and, on the Monday following, started for the north, visiting his Societies at Stroud, Painswick, Tewkesbury, Worcester, and other places, until, on March 25, he arrived at Birmingham.[2] Mr. Benson says Fletcher joined Wesley "at London, or more probably at Bristol, and accompanied him on his journeys through Gloucestershire, and Worcestershire, and a part of Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and Shropshire. He did not, however, proceed further north with Mr. Wesley, at that time, but stopped at Madeley, for reasons which he mentioned to me in the following letter, written soon after:—

"'MY DEAR BROTHER,—I would have answered your letter before now, had I not been overdone with writing. I have just concluded an answer to Mr. Evans and Dr. Price; a work which I have undertaken with a desire to serve the cause of religion, as well as that of loyalty. This work has prevented me from following Mr. Wesley. Besides, as the clergyman who is here with me (a student from Edmund Hall[3]), has just accepted a place near Manchester, I shall still be without a curate.

"'I see so little fruit in these parts that I am almost disheartened, both with respect to the power of the Word, and the experience of the professors I converse with. I am closely followed with the thought that the kingdom in the Holy Ghost is almost lost; and that faith in the dispensation of the Spirit is at a very low ebb. But it may be, I think so on account of my little experience, and the weakness of the faith of those whom I meet. It may be better in all other places. I shall be glad to travel a little to see the goodness of the land. God deliver us from all extremes, and make and keep us humble, loving, disinterested, and zealous! I preached, before Mr. Greaves came, as much as my strength could well admit, although to little purpose; but I must not complain. If one person receive a good desire in ten years, by my instrumentality, it is a greater honour than I deserve—an honour for which I could not be too thankful. Let us bless the Lord for all things. We have reasons innumerable to do it. Bless Him on my account, as well as your own; and the God of peace be with you.'"[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Wesley's Journal.

[3] The College, at Oxford, to which the Countess of Huntingdon had been accustomed to send godly young men, to prepare them for Orders, and from which six of her students had been expelled, in 1768.

Before proceeding further, it may be added, that Joseph Benson doubted the propriety of Wesley and Fletcher turning their attention to politics. In an unpublished letter, dated "Newcastle, May 21, 1776," he wrote:—

"These are 'perilous times' indeed, and threaten to be more perilous still. You see what a famous politician our friend Fletcher is become. Though I exceedingly approve both of the 'Calm Address' and its 'Vindication,' I fear these subjects only detain the authors from more valuable and important work. We expected Mr. Fletcher here along with Mr. Wesley; but I understand, by a letter from him yesterday, that he has been prevented, by his having to answer Dr. Price and Mr. Evans. And there is more work for him still. A friend of ours, in London, has sent Mr. Cownley and me a pamphlet, which, in some important points, takes Mr. Fletcher's 'Vindication' thoroughly to pieces. I fear he will find it no easy thing to reply to some of its arguments. As for Price, his ideas of liberty are beyond measure extravagant; and Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Wesley will find it no very difficult matter to reply to *him*. But, the principal thing to be thought, talked, and wrote about, is the *baptism of the Spirit*, or the *inward kingdom of God*. Oh! my friend, this is but little known among us!"

To his old friend, Mr. Vaughan, Fletcher wrote:—

"MADELEY, *March* 21, 1776.

"DEAR SIR,—Your barrel of cider came safe to hand. How could you think to make me such a present? But I must rather thank you for your love and generosity, than scold you for your excessive profusion. You should have stayed till cider was ten shillings a hogshead, but in such a year as this—! However, the Lord reward you, and return it to you, in streams of living water, and plenty of the wine of His kingdom!

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"I thought I should soon have done with controversy; but now I give up the hope of having done with it before I die. There are three sorts of people I must continually attack, or defend myself against—Gallios, Pharisees, and Antinomians. I hope I shall die in harness fighting against some of them. I do not, however, forget, that the Gallio, the Simon, and the Nicholas *within*, are far more dangerous to me than those without. In my own heart, that immense field, I must *first* fight the Lord's battles and my own. Help me here; join me in this field. All Christians are here militia-men, if they are not professed soldiers. O, my friend, I need wisdom—*meekness of wisdom!* A heart full of it is better than all your cider vault full of the most generous liquors; and it is in Christ for us. O! go and ask for you and me; and I shall ask for me and you. May we not be ashamed, nor afraid to come, and beg every moment for wine and milk—grace and wisdom!

"Beware, my friend, of the world. Let not its cares, nor the deceitfulness of its riches, keep or draw you from Jesus. Before you handle the birdlime, be sure you dip your heart and hand in the oil of grace. Time flies. Years of plenty and of scarcity, of peace and war, disappear before the eternity to which we are all hastening.

"Remember me kindly to Mrs. Vaughan. That the Lord would abundantly bless you both, in your souls, bodies, concerns, and children, is the sincere wish of your affectionate friend,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The following letter, to Charles Wesley, refers, among other things, to another of Fletcher's publications, which has yet to be noticed:—

"MADELEY, *May* 11, 1776.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—What are you doing in London? Are you ripening as fast for the grave as I am? How should we lay out every moment for God! For some days, I have had the symptoms of an inward consumptive decay—spitting of blood, etc. Thank God! I look at our last enemy with great calmness. I hope, however, that the Lord will spare me to publish my end of the controversy, which is *A Double Dissertation upon the Doctrines of Grace and Justice*. This piece will, I flatter myself, reconcile all the *candid* Calvinists and *candid* Arminians, and be a means of pointing out the way in which peace and harmony may be restored to the Church.

"I still look for an outpouring of the Spirit, inwardly and outwardly. Should I die before that great day, I shall have the consolation to see it from afar. Thank God! I enjoy uninterrupted peace in the midst of my trials, which are, sometimes, not a few. Joy also I possess; but I look for joy of a superior nature. I feel myself, in a good degree, dead to praise and dispraise: I hope, at least, that it is so; because I do not feel that the one lifts me up, or that the other dejects me. I want to see a Pentecost Christian Church; and, if it is not to be seen at this time upon earth, I am willing to go and see that glorious wonder in heaven. How is it with you? Are you ready to seize the crown in the name of the Redeemer *reigning* in your heart? We run a race towards the grave. John is likely to outrun you, unless you have a swift foot.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 229.

"I had lately a letter from one of the preachers, who finds great fault with me, for having published, in my book on Perfection, your hymn called *The Last Wish*. He calls it dangerous mysticism. My *private* thoughts are, that the truth lies between *driving* Methodism and *still* mysticism. What think you? Read the addresses which I have added to that piece, and tell me your thoughts.

"Let us pray that God would renew our youth, as that of the eagle, that we may bear fruit in our old age. I hope I shall see you *before* my death: if not, let us rejoice at the thought of meeting in heaven."[1]

The censured hymn was the following.—

"To do, or not to do; to have,
Or not to have, I leave to Thee:
To be, or not to be, I leave:
Thy only will be done in me.
All my requests are lost in one:
Father, Thy only will be done.

"Suffice that, for the season past,
Myself in things Divine I sought,
For comforts cried with eager haste,
And murmur'd that I found them not:
I leave it now to Thee alone,
Father, Thy only will be done.

"Thy gifts I clamour for no more,
Or selfishly Thy grace require,
An evil heart to varnish o'er;
Jesus, the Giver, I desire;
After the flesh no longer known:
Father, Thy only will be done.

"Welcome alike the crown or cross;
Trouble I cannot ask, nor peace,
Nor toil, nor rest, nor gain, nor loss,
Nor joy, nor grief, nor pain, nor ease,
Nor life, nor death; but ever groan,
Father, Thy only will be done."

This was what Wesley's Itinerant Preacher called "*dangerous* mysticism," and Fletcher, "*still* mysticism." Whether Fletcher himself experienced this "destruction of self-will," and "absolute resignation, which characterises a perfect believer," it is difficult to determine; but it may safely be affirmed that he was struggling to attain to such a state of holiness. "This hymn," said he, "suits all the believers who are at the bottom of Mount Sion, and begin to join the spirits of just men made perfect." And then, as a specimen of what he calls "*driving* Methodism," he adds:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 231.

> "But when the triumphal chariot of perfect love *gloriously* carries you to the top of perfection's hill;—when you are raised far above the *common* heights of the perfect,—when you are almost translated into glory like Elijah, *then* you may sing another hymn of the same Christian poet" (Charles Wesley) "with the Rev. Mr. Madan, and the numerous body of imperfectionists who use his collection of Psalms, etc."

This, of course, was a quiet satire on Martin Madan and his Calvinistic congregation; but, passing that, the "*driving* hymn was as follows:—

"Who in Jesus confide,
  They are bold to outride
The storms of affliction beneath:
  With the prophet they soar
  To that heavenly shore,
And out-fly all the arrows of death.

"By faith *we are come*
  To our *permanent home;*
By hope we *the rapture improve:*
  By love we *still rise,*
  And *look down* on the skies—
For the *heaven of heavens is love!*

"Who on earth can conceive
  How happy *we live*
In the city of God the great King!
  What a concert of praise,
  When our Jesus's grace
The whole heavenly company sing!

"What a rapturous song,
  When the glorified throng
In the spirit of harmony join!
  Join all the glad choirs,
  Hearts, voices, and lyres,
And the burden is mercy divine!"[1]

---

[1] Fletcher's "Last Check to Antinomianism," p. 323.

Why these long quotations? Simply to show that real Christian Perfection is, according to the "*private* thoughts" of Fletcher, one of the holiest of the old Methodists, a something that "lies between" the "driving Methodism and *still* mysticism" embodied in the two remarkable hymns just cited.

Soon after the date of the last letter (May 11, 1776) Fletcher's health so entirely failed, that he was compelled to leave his parish and repair to the hot wells at Bristol. His friend, Charles Wesley, on June 30, embodied the feelings of his full heart in the following touching hymn:—

"Jesus, Thy feeble servant see!
Sick is the man beloved by Thee:
Thy name to magnify,
To spread Thy Gospel-truths again,
His precious soul in life detain,
Nor suffer him to die.

"The fervent prayer Thou oft hast heard,
Thy glorious arm in mercy bared;
Thy wonder-working power
Appear'd in all Thy people's sight,
And stopp'd the Spirit in its flight,
Or bade the grave restore.

"In faith we ask a fresh reprieve:
Frequent in deaths he still shall live,
If Thou pronounce the word;
Shall spend for Thee, his strength renew'd,
Witness of the all-cleansing blood,
Forerunner of his Lord.

"The Spirit that raised Thee from the dead,
Be in its quick'ning virtue shed,
His mortal flesh to raise,
To consecrate Thy human shrine,
And fill with energy divine
Thy minister of grace.

"Body and soul at once revive;
The prayer of faith in which we strive,
So shall we all proclaim,
According to Thy gracious will,
Omnipotent the sick to heal,
From age to age the same."[1]

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1835, p. 576.

Fifteen years ago (soon after he came to Madeley), at Christmas time, in a dark night, Fletcher, on the top of Lincoln-hill woods, was at a loss which way to take to reach his vicarage at Madeley. Providentially, he met a working man of Coalbrookdale, Michael Onions by name, who was on his way to Broseley to fetch a fiddler for a dancing party in Michael's house. Fletcher told him he had lost his road to Madeley, and asked him to put him right. Good-tempered Michael went half-a-mile out of his way to render the muffled stranger the necessary guidance. Conversation ensued; Michael explained the object of his journey to Broseley; Fletcher warned him of his sin and danger; Michael became alarmed, and, instead of proceeding to Broseley to secure the services of the fiddler, returned to his dwelling at Coalbrookdale. On his entering, the assembled dancers asked, "Have you brought the fiddler?" "No," said Michael. "Is he not at home?" "I don't know." "Have you not been to Broseley?" "No." "Why? What's the matter? You look ill, and are all of a tremble." Michael then stated that he had met some one on the top of Lincoln-hill woods; but whether man or angel he knew not; and, after relating the conversation between them, added, "I dare not go to Broseley—I would not for the world." Next Sunday morning, Michael and some of his dancing friends went to Madeley church; and there, in the voice of Fletcher, he recognized the mysterious traveller he had met with on Lincoln-hill. Michael was converted, and became one of the first Methodists in Coalbrookdale.[1] To this humble, but faithful Christian friend, and to his fellow Methodists, Fletcher now wrote as follows:—

"BRISTOL, *July* 11, 1776.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—Having just seen, at the Wells, Mr. Darby, who is going back to the Dale, I gladly seize the opportunity of letting you know what the Lord is doing for my soul and body.

"With respect to my soul, I feel a degree of righteousness, peace, and joy, and wait for the establishment of His internal kingdom in the Holy Ghost. The hope of my being rooted and grounded in the love, that casts out slavish fear, grows more lively every day. I am not afraid of any evil tidings, and my heart stands calm, believing in the Lord, and desiring Him to do with me whatsoever He pleaseth.

---

[1] *Wesleyan Times*, March 3, 1856, p. 138.

"With respect to my body, I know not what to say; but the physician says he hopes I shall do well; and so I hope, and believe too, whether I recover my strength or not. Health and sickness, life and death, are best when the Lord sends them. All things work together for good to those that love God.

"I am forbid preaching; but, blessed be God! I am not forbid, by my heavenly Physician, to pray, believe, and love. This is a sweet work, which heals, delights, and strengthens.

"I hope you bear me on your hearts, as I do you on mine. My wish for you is that you may be possessors of an inward kingdom of grace; that you may so hunger and thirst after righteousness as to be filled. Oh! be hearty in the cause of religion. Be *humbly* zealous for your own salvation, and for God's glory; nor forget to care for the salvation of each other. Keep yourselves in the love of God; and keep one another by *example*, *reproof*, *exhortation*, *encouragement*, *social prayer*, and *a faithful use of all the means of grace*. Use yourselves to bow at the feet of Christ. Go to Him continually for the holy anointing of His Spirit, who will be a Teacher always near, always with you and in you. If you have that *inward* Instructor, you will suffer no material loss when your outward teachers are removed. Make the most of dear Mr. Greaves[1] while you have him. While you have the light of God's word, believe in the light, that you may be children of the light, fitted for the kingdom of eternal light, where I charge you to meet your affectionate brother and minister,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

To Charles Perronet, son of the venerable Vicar of Shoreham, Fletcher wrote:—

"BRISTOL, *July* 12, 1776.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—I gladly thank you for your last favour. The Lord keeps me hanging by a thread. He weighs me in the balance for life and death; I trust Him for the choice. He knows, far better than I, what is best; and I leave all to His unerring wisdom. I am calm, and wait, with submission, for what the Lord will say concerning me. I wait to be baptized into *all His fulness*, and trust the word—*the word of His grace*."[3]

Exactly a month after the date of this letter, holy Charles Perronet himself fell asleep in Jesus. "My dear Charles," wrote his venerable father, "after wearing out a weakly constitution in the most unwearied endeavours to bring many to

---

[1] Who had again become Fletcher's curate.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 14.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 231.

Christ, breathed out his pious soul in the remarkable words of his dear Lord, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'" "I have uninterrupted fellowship with God," cried the dying saint; "and Christ is all in all to me."[1] As soon as Fletcher heard of the death of this godly man, he wrote to the bereaved father as follows:—

"Methinks I see you, right honoured Sir, mounted, as another Moses, on the top of Pisgah, and through the telescope of faith descrying the promised land; or, rather, in the present instance, I observe you, like another Joshua, on the banks of Jordan, viewing all Israel, with your son among them, passing over the river to their great possessions. Permit me, therefore, in consideration of your years and office, to exclaim, in the language of young Elisha to his ancient seer, 'My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof.'

"'There, there they are, and there is your son!
Whom faith pursues, and eager hope discerns,
In yon bright chariot, as a cherub borne
On wings of love, to uncreated realms
Of deathless joy, and everlasting peace.'"[2]

On the day Charles Perronet died, Wesley was in Bristol, and wrote:—

"1776. August 12.—I found Mr. Fletcher a little better, and proposed his taking a journey with me to Cornwall; nothing being so likely to restore his health as a journey of four or five hundred miles. But his physician would in no wise consent, so I gave up the point."[3]

Instead of going to Cornwall Fletcher returned to Madeley, where he wrote two letters to his friend, James Ireland, Esq., from which the following are extracts:—

"Madeley, August 18, 1776. My breast is very weak, but, if it please God, it will in time recover strength. Mr. Greaves will take all the duty upon himself, and I shall continue to take rest, exercise, and the food which was recommended to me. The Lord grant me to rest myself on Christ, to exercise myself in charity, and to feed upon the bread of life, which God has given us in Jesus Christ.

"I thank you, my dear friend, for all your favours and all your attention to me. What returns shall I make? I will drink the cup of thanksgiving, and I will bless the name of the Lord. I will thank my dear friend and wish him all the temporal blessings he conferred upon me, and all those spiritual ones which were not in his power to bestow. Live in health; live piously; live content; live in Christ; live for eternity; live to make your wife, your children, your servants, your neighbours happy. And may the God of all grace give back a hundredfold to you and your dear wife all the kindnesses with which you have loaded me."[1]

---

[1] Atmore's "Methodist Memorial."
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[3] Wesley's Journal.

"Madeley, August 24, 1776. My dear friend, I have received the news of your *loss*, and of the *gain* of your younger daughter. She has entered into port, and has left you on a tempestuous sea. I recommend to Mrs. Ireland the resignation of David when he lost his son; and do you give her the example. The day of death is preferable to that of our birth; with respect to infants, the maxim of Solomon is indubitable. O what an honour is it to be the father and mother of a little cherub who hovers round the throne of God in heavenly glory!

"Roquet[2] dead and buried! The jolly man who last summer shook his head at me as at a dying man! How frail are we! God help us to live *to-day!* to-morrow is the fool's day.

"I have not, at present, the least idea that I am called to quit my post here. I see no probability of being useful in Switzerland. My call is here; I am sure of it. If I undertook the journey, it would be merely to accompany you. I dare not gratify friendship by taking such a step. I have no faith in the prescriptions of your physician; and I think if health be better for us than sickness, we may enjoy it as well here as in France or Italy. If sickness be best for us, why shun it? Everything is good when it comes from God. Nothing but a baptism of fire and the most evident openings of Providence can engage me in such a journey. If I reject your obliging offer to procure me a substitute, attribute it to my fear of taking a false step, of quitting my post without command, and of engaging in a warfare to which the Lord does not call me."[3]

A fortnight later, Fletcher wrote again to Mr. Ireland:—

"Madeley, September 7, 1776. My dear friend, my health is better than when I wrote last. I have not yet preached; rather from a sense of duty to my friends, and high thoughts of the labours of Mr. Greaves (who does the work of an evangelist to better purpose than I), than to spare myself; for, if I am not mistaken, I am as able to do my work now as I was a year ago.

"A fortnight ago, I paid a visit to West Bromwich. I ran away from the kindness of my parishioners, who oppressed me with tokens of their love. To me there is nothing so extremely trying as excessive kindness. I am of the king's mind when the people showed their love to him on his journey to Portsmouth: 'I can bear,' he said, 'the hissings of a London mob, but these shouts of joy are too much for me.' You, my dear friend, Mrs. Ireland, Mrs. Norman, and all your family, have put me to that severe trial, to which all trials caused by the hard words that have been spoken against me are nothing.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 232.

[2] The Rev. James Roquet, who, in 1775, had turned against his old friend Wesley respecting the rebellion in America.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 234.

"At our age, a recovery can be but a short reprieve. Let us then give up ourselves daily to the Lord, as people who have no confidence in the flesh, and do not trust to to-morrow. I find my weakness, unprofitableness, and wretchedness daily more and more; and the more I find them, the more help I have to sink into self-abhorrence. Nor do I despair to sink so in it as to die to self and revive in my God."[1]

Fletcher began to hope that he would soon be able to resume his work. To Charles Wesley he wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *September* 15, 1776.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—I lately consulted a pious gentleman, near Lichfield, famous for his skill in the disorders of the breast. He assured me I am in no immediate danger of a consumption of the lungs; and that my disorder is upon the nerves, in consequence of too close thinking. He permitted me to write and preach in moderation; and gave me medicines, which, I think, are of service in taking off my feverish heats. My spitting of blood is stopped, and I may yet be spared to travel with you as an invalid.

"If God adds one inch to my span I see my calling. I desire to know nothing but Christ, and Him crucified, revealed in the Spirit. I long to feel the *utmost power* of the Spirit's dispensation, and I will endeavour to bear my testimony to the glory of that dispensation both with my pen and tongue. Some of our injudicious or inattentive friends will probably charge me with *novelty* for it; but, be that as it will, let us meekly stand for the truth as it is in Jesus, and trust the Lord for everything. I thank God I feel so dead to popular applause that, I trust, I should not be afraid to maintain a truth against all the world; and yet I dread to dissent from any child of God, and feel ready to condescend to every one. O what depths of humble love, and what heights of Gospel truth, do I sometimes see! I want to sink into the former and rise into the latter. Help me by your example, letters, and prayers."[1]

At the same period of time, Fletcher wrote to Joseph Benson, giving him an account of the state of his health and of his literary projects.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—Your kind letter has followed me from Bristol to Madeley, where I have been for some weeks. My health is better than it was in August, but it is far from being established. Close thinking and writing had brought upon me a slow fever, with a

---

Letters, 1791, p. 236.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 237.

cough and spitting of blood, which a physician took for symptoms of a consumption of the lungs; whereas they were only symptoms of a consumption of the nerves and solids. He put me accordingly upon the lowest diet, and had me blooded four times, which made much against me. I am, however, greatly recovered since I have begun to eat meat again. My cough and spitting of blood have left me, but want of sleep and a slow fever keep me still very low. If the Lord pleases, He can in a moment restore my strength; but He needs not a worm. I thank Him for having kept me perfectly resigned to His will, and calm in the awful scene which I have passed through.

"I design to conclude my last controversial piece as I shall be able, and hope it will give my friends some satisfaction; because it will show the cause of all our doctrinal errors, and will place the doctrine of election and reprobation upon its proper basis. I finish also my essay on the 'Dispensation of the Spirit,'[1] which is the thing I want most to see your thoughts upon. Pray for light and power, truth and love; and impart to me a share of your experiences, to quicken my dulness of apprehension and feeling. If God spare me a little, it will be to bear my testimony to the doctrine of perfect spiritual Christianity. May we be personal witnesses of this glorious dispensation, and be so inflamed with love as to kindle all around us.

"Give my kind love and thanks to all enquiring friends. If I live over the winter, I shall, should Providence open the way, visit you all" [at Newcastle-on-Tyne], "and assure you that I am in Christ your affectionate brother and servant."[2]

Three weeks after the date of these letters, poor Fletcher's hope of recovery was terribly shaken. On October 5, 1776, his disorder unexpectedly and violently returned, and his friends around him thought he was about to die. Some one, perhaps his curate, Mr. Greaves, immediately improvised a beautiful hymn, which was sung, by a distressed congregation, in Madeley church, on the following day, Friday, October 6. The hymn is too full of affection and piety to be omitted. It was as follows:—

"O Thou, before whose gracious throne
We bow our suppliant spirits down,
View the sad breast and streaming eye,
And let our sorrows pierce the sky.

"Thou know'st the anxious cares we feel,
And all our trembling lips would tell;

---

[1] This essay was not published separately, but was probably embodied in the "Portrait of St. Paul," to be noticed anon.

[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

Thou only canst assuage our grief,
And yield our woe-fraught hearts relief.

"Though we have sinned, and justly dread
The vengeance hovering o'er our head,
Yet, Power benign! Thy servant spare,
Nor turn aside Thy people's prayer.

"Avert the swift-descending stroke,
Nor smite the shepherd of the flock;
Lest o'er the barren waste we stray,
To prowling wolves an easy prey.

"Restore him, sinking to the grave;
Stretch out Thy arm, make haste to save;
Back to our hopes and wishes give,
And bid our friend and father live.

"Bound to each soul with sacred ties,
In every breast his image lies;
Thy pitying aid, O God, impart,
Nor rend him from each bleeding heart.

"Yet, if our supplications fail,
And prayers and tears cannot prevail,
Condemned, on this dark desert coast,
To mourn our much-loved leader lost,—

"Be Thou his strength, be Thou his stay,
Support him through the gloomy way;
Comfort his soul, surround his bed,
And guide him through the dreary shade.

"Around him may Thy angels wait,
Deck'd with their robes of heavenly state,
To teach his happy soul to rise,
And waft him to his native skies."[1]

As soon as possible, Wesley made his way to Madeley, and escorted Fletcher to London. On November 13, they set out for Norwich, and nine days afterwards Wesley wrote, "I brought Mr. Fletcher back to London considerably better than when he set out." Among other places, they visited Lowestoft, where Wesley opened the new Preaching-house, and where Fletcher preached on Wednesday morning, November 20.[1] Whilst here, he wrote the following to Mr. Benson:—

---

[1] *The Local Preacher's Magazine*, 1852, p. 113.

"LOWESTOFT, *November* 21, 1776.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mr. Wesley having invited me to travel with him, to see if change of air and motion will be a means of restoring me to a share of my former health, I have accompanied him through Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Norfolk; and I hope I am rather better than worse. I find it good to be with this extraordinary servant of God. I think his diligence and wisdom are matchless. It is a good school for me, only I am too old a scholar to make proficiency. However, let us live to God to-day, and trust Him for to-morrow; so that, whether we are laid up in a sick bed or a damp grave, or whether we are yet able to act, we may be able to say,

"'God is the sea of love,
Where all my pleasures roll,
The circle where my passions move,
And centre of my soul.'"[2]

Another characteristic letter must be introduced. Certain good Methodists at Hull and York having invited him, when able, to visit the great Methodist county, Fletcher wrote to them as follows:—

"To Messrs. Hare, Terry, Fox, and Good, at Hull;—and Messrs. Preston, Simpson, and Ramsden, at York.

"LONDON, *November* 12, 1776.

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—I thank you for your kind letters and invitations to visit you, and the brethren about you. I have often found an attraction in Yorkshire. My desire was indeed a little selfish; I wanted to improve by the conversation of my unknown brethren. If God bids me be strong again, I shall be glad to try if He will be pleased to comfort us by the mutual faith both of you and me. My desire is, that Christ may be glorified both in my life and death. If I have any desire to live at any time, it is principally to be a witness, in word and deed, of the dispensation of *power from on high;* and to point out that kingdom which does not consist in word, but in *power*, even in *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, the *Spirit of power*. I am writing an Essay upon that important part of the Christian doctrine.

"Should I be spared to visit you, the keep of a horse, and the poor rider, will be all the burden I should lay on you; and that will be more than my Heavenly Master indulged Himself in. I am just setting out for Norwich with Mr. Wesley, whose renewed strength and immense labours astonish me. What a pattern for preachers! His redeeming the time is, if I mistake not, matchless.

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"Should I never have the pleasure of thanking you in person for your brotherly regard, I beg you will endeavour to meet me in the kingdom of our Father, where distance of time and place is lost in the fulness of Him who is *all in all.* The way ye know,—the penitential way of a heart-felt faith working by obedient love."[1]

Early in the month of December, Fletcher visited Mr. Gorham, at St. Neots. One of his inducements to undertake this journey was to have an opportunity of conversing with Berridge, Vicar of Everton, and with Henry Venn, who, a few years before, had left Huddersfield, and settled in a small country village, as Rector of Yelling. Mr. Gorham's son accompanied Fletcher to Everton. Sixteen years had elapsed since Fletcher's former visit there; and, during that interval, Berridge had published his "Christian World Unmasked;" and Fletcher had severely handled its Calvinian doctrines in his "Fifth Check to Antinomianism;" but there was no room for malice in Christian hearts like theirs. The instant Fletcher entered the parsonage at Everton, Berridge rose up, ran to meet him, embraced him with folded arms, and cried, "My dear brother, how could we write against each other, when we both aim at the same thing—the glory of God, and the good of souls! My book lies quietly on the shelf,—and there let it lie." For two hours, the loving polemics had an unbroken conversation; when Berridge said, "We must not part without praying." Down they fell upon their knees. Full of the great truth then occupying his mind, and which probably had been the chief subject of conversation with his friend, Fletcher began to pray for an effusion of the Spirit, and for greater degrees of sanctification and usefulness. Berridge followed, with a prayer full of love and faith. The two seemed as if it were impossible to separate; and Fletcher had to be *torn* away, to keep an appointment, at St. Neots, with the Rector of Yelling. Venn was charmed with Fletcher, and became so absorbed in the conversation, that Fletcher had to remind him, playfully, of the meal before him. A year afterwards, they met again, at Bristol, lodged together for six weeks in the same house, and Venr, on his return to Yelling, declared, from his pulpit, that Fletcher was "like an angel on earth."

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine,* 1801, p. 43.

Notwithstanding considerable opposition, Fletcher was permitted to preach once in St. Neots Church, and took, as his text, "We love Him, because He first loved us." Many hung upon the lips of the preacher; but three or four of his hearers, in great dudgeon, left before his sermon was ended. "I will not be tedious," cried Fletcher, as the discontented were retreating, "but oh that I might persuade you to love Him, who first loved us!" About thirty of his congregation followed him to his lodgings, where, at their request, he preached again, most of those that were present being powerfully affected.

Considering the state of his health, this preaching exercise was hardly prudent; but Fletcher had less regard for his health than for what he conceived to be his duty. The season was the depth of winter; but he maintained his accustomed early rising. One morning, before four o'clock, Mr. Gorham stole gently into his chamber, and kindled his fire. The crackling of the wood awoke him; and, instantly, showing the frame of mind in which he habitually lived, whether awake or asleep, he cried, "Is it you, my kind host, with your candle and fire? May the Lord light the candle of faith and the fire of love in our hearts!" When nearly fifty years had elapsed, Mr. Gorham said, "I have never forgotten this salutation; and often do I step into the room, and look at the spot where I received the dear saint's thanks, and heard his prayer."[1]

At this time, there resided at the suburban village of Stoke Newington a gentleman who must have a brief notice. His father, James Greenwood, was one of the earliest members of the Methodist Society, at the Foundery, London; and he himself was one of the first trustees of Wesley's chapel, in City Road. He had a lucrative business, as an upholsterer, in Rood Lane and Fenchurch Street; and died, at the age of fifty-six, in 1783, his remains being put into one of the early-dug graves in the burial ground of City Road Chapel.[2] Wesley's mention of his death is worth quoting:—

---

[1] Appendix to Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Stevenson's "City Road Chapel."

"1783, *February* 21.—To-day Charles Greenwood went to rest. He had been a melancholy man all his days, full of doubts and fears, and continually writing bitter things against himself. When he was first taken ill, he said he should die, and was miserable through fear of death; but, two days before he died, the clouds dispersed, and he was unspeakably happy, telling his friends, 'God has revealed to me things which it is impossible for man to utter.' Just when he died, such glory filled the room, that it seemed to be a little heaven; none could grieve or shed a tear, but all present appeared to be partakers of his joy."[1]

In the necrology of the Methodists, there are but few brighter death-bed scenes than that of Charles Greenwood, of Stoke Newington.[2]

On his return from St. Neots, on December 16, Fletcher took up his residence in the house of this worthy man. Wesley disapproved of this, and wrote:—

"I verily believe, if Mr. Fletcher had travelled with me, partly in the chaise, and partly on horseback, only a few months longer, he would quite have recovered his health. But this those about him would not permit: so being detained in London by his kind but injudicious friends, while I pursued my journeys, his spitting of blood, with all the other symptoms, returned, and rapidly increased, till the physicians pronounced him to be far advanced in a true, pulmonary consumption."[3]

Fletcher continued to reside with Mr. Greenwood till about the beginning of the month of May, 1777; but, before proceeding to that year, extracts must be given from a remarkable letter, which he wrote "to the parishioners of Madeley." This was one of his last efforts in the year 1776:—

"NEWINGTON, *December* 28, 1776.

"MY DEAR PARISHIONERS,—I hoped to have spent the Christmas holidays with you, and to have ministered to you in holy things; but the weakness of my body confining me here, I humbly submit to the Divine dispensation. I ease the trouble of my absence by reflecting on the pleasure I have felt, in years past, while singing with you, 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.' This truth is as true now as it was then. Let us receive it with all readiness, and it will unite us.

"In order to this, may the eye of your understanding be more and more opened to see your need of a Redeemer; and to behold the suitableness, freeness, and fulness of the redemption, which was wrought out by the Son of God, and which is applied by the Spirit through faith! The wish which glows in my soul is so ardent and powerful, that it brings me down on my knees, while I write, and, in that supplicating posture, I entreat you all to consider and improve the day of your visitation, and to prepare, in good earnest, to meet, with joy, your God and your unworthy pastor in another world. I beseech you, by all the ministerial and providential calls you have had for these seventeen years, harden not your hearts. Let the longsuffering of God towards us, who survive the hundreds I have buried, lead us all to repentance. Dismiss your sins, and embrace Jesus Christ, who wept for you in the manger, bled for you in Gethsemane, hung for you on the cross, and now pleads for you on His mediatorial throne. By all that is dear to you, meet me not on the great day in your sins, enemies to Christ by *unbelief*, and to God by *wicked works*.

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

[2] See an account of it in the *Arminian Magazine* for 1783.

[3] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

"The sum of all I have preached to you is contained in four propositions. First, heartily repent of your sins, original and actual. Secondly, believe the Gospel of Christ in sincerity and truth. Thirdly, in the power which true faith gives, run the way of God's commandments before God and men. Fourthly, by continuing to take up your cross, and to receive the pure milk of God's word, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

"Should God bid me stay on earth a little longer, and should He renew my strength to do among you the work of a pastor, I hope I shall prove a more humble, zealous, and diligent minister than I have hitherto been. Some of you have supposed that I made more ado about eternity and your precious souls than they were worth; but how great was your mistake. Alas! it is my grief and shame that I have not been, both in public and private, a thousand times more earnest and importunate with you about your spiritual concerns. Pardon me, my dear friends,—pardon me my ignorances and negligences in this respect. And as I most humbly ask your forgiveness, so I most heartily forgive any of you, who may, at any time, have made no account of my little labours.

"The more nearly I consider death and the grave, judgment and eternity, the more I feel that I have preached to you the truth, and that the truth is solid as the rock of ages. Although I hope to see much more of the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living than I do see, yet, blessed be the Divine mercy! I see enough to keep my mind at all times unruffled, and to make me willing calmly to resign my soul into the hands of my faithful Creator, my loving Redeemer, and my sanctifying Comforter, *this moment*, or *the next*, if He calls for it. I desire your public thanks for all the favours He showeth me continually, with respect to both my soul and body. Help me to be thankful; for it is a *pleasant thing* to be thankful. Permit me also to bespeak an interest in your prayers. Ask that my faith may be willing to receive *all* that God's grace is willing to bestow. Ask that I may *meekly* suffer, and *zealously* do all the will of God; and that, living or dying, I may say, with the witness of God's Spirit, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

"If God calls me from earth, I beg He may appoint a more faithful shepherd over you. You need not fear that He will not: you see that, for these many months, you have not only had no famine of the word, but the richest plenty; and what God has done for months, He can do for years; yea, for all the years of your life. Only pray; 'ask and you shall receive.' Meet me at the throne of grace, and you shall meet at the throne of glory your affectionate, obliged, and unworthy minister,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 21.

CHAPTER XX.

PUBLICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE IN 1777.

IN the year 1777, Fletcher terminated his controversy with the Calvinists. He wrote :—

> "To the best of my knowledge, I have not fixed one consequence upon the principles of my opponents, which does not fairly and necessarily flow from their doctrine. And I have endeavoured to do justice to their piety, declaring, again and again, my full persuasion that they abhor such consequences."

His publications, in 1777, were the following :—

1. "The Doctrines of Grace and Justice equally essential to the pure Gospel: Being some Remarks on the mischievous divisions caused among Christians, by parting those doctrines. Being an Introduction to a Plan of Reconciliation between the Defenders of the Doctrines of *Partial Grace*, commonly called *Calvinists;* and the Defenders of the Doctrines of *Impartial Justice*, commonly called *Arminians.* By John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. London: Printed by R. Hawes, 1777." 12mo, 39 pp.

It is needless to furnish an outline of this able pamphlet, inasmuch as the doctrines it enforces and the doctrines it condemns are substantially the same as have been repeatedly introduced to the reader's notice. There is one statement, however, which Fletcher's admirers have generally overlooked, but which proves, beyond controversy, that Fletcher was, what is now-a-days called, a Millenarian. After dwelling on what he designates the "four dispensations," namely, "Gentilism," "Judaism," "the Gospel of John the Baptist," and "the perfect Gospel of Christ," which "is Gentilism, Judaism, and the Baptism of John, arrived at their full maturity," he proceeds to argue that "another Gospel dispensation" is yet to come. Hence the following :—

> "In the Psalms, Prophets, Acts, Epistles, and especially in the Revelation, we have a variety of promises, that, 'in the day of His' displayed 'power,' Christ will 'come in His glory, to judge among the heathen, to wound even kings in the day of His wrath, to root up the wicked, to fill the places with their dead bodies, to smite in sunder' antichrist, and 'the heads over divers countries,' and to 'lift up His' triumphant 'head' on this very earth, where He once 'bowed His' wounded 'head, and gave up the ghost.' Compare Psalm cx. with Acts i. 11, 2 Thess. i. 10, Rev. xix., etc. In that great day, another Gospel dispensation shall take place. We have it now in prophecy, as the Jews had the Gospel of Christ's first advent; but when Christ shall 'come to destroy the wicked, to be' actually 'glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe,—in that day,' ministers of the Gospel shall no more prophesy, but, speaking a plain historical truth, they shall lift up their voices as 'the voice of many waters and mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth; the marriage of the Lamb is come; His wife,' the church of the first-born, has made herself ready; blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; he reigns with Christ a thousand years' (Rev. xix. 20). 'Blessed are the meek, for they do inherit the earth' (Matt. x. 5). 'The times of refreshing are come; and He has sent Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you, whom the heavens did receive' till this solemn season; but now are come 'the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts iii. 19, etc.) May the Lord hasten this Gospel dispensation! and, till it take place, may, 'the Spirit and the bride say, Come!'"

It must be granted that this is but remotely related to the Calvinian controversy; but, in a Life of Fletcher, it is too interesting to be omitted.

2. Fletcher's second publication, in 1777, was a composite one, and embraced, First, secondly "Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism: A two-fold Essay,—Part the First displaying the doctrines of Partial Grace, Part the Second, those of Impartial Justice." 12mo., 84 pp. Secondly, First "The Reconciliation; or, an Easy Method to unite the professing People of God, by placing the Doctrines of Grace and Justice in such a light as to make candid *Arminians* Bible-Calvinists; and the candid Calvinists, Bible-Arminians." 12mo, 85 pp. Thirdly, to these was appended, "The *Plan* of Reconciliation," the whole making a small 12mo volume of 187 pages. The

pamphlets were dedicated to his friend "James Ireland, Esq., of Brislington, near Bristol," as follows :—

"DEAR SIR,—To whom could a plan of reconciliation between the Calvinists and Arminians be more properly dedicated, than to a son of peace, whose heart, hand, and house are open to Calvinists, Arminians, and neuters? You kindly receive the divines who contend for the doctrines of grace; and I want words to describe the Christian courtesy which you show me and other ministers who make a stand for the doctrines of justice. To you I am indebted for the honour of a friendly interview with the author[1] of the 'Circular Letter,' which I thought myself obliged to oppose; and, as you succeeded in that labour of love, it is natural for me to hope that by your influence, and by the patronage of such candid, generous peacemakers as the gentleman" (John Thornton, Esq.) "to whom I have often compared you, these reconciling sheets will be perused by some with more attention than if they had no name prefixed to them but that of your most obliged, affectionate friend and servant, J. FLETCHER.

"NEWINGTON, *April* 16, 1777."

It is a well-known fact that men like Romaine were often the guests of Mr. Ireland; and that Berridge, Venn, and others of the same way of thinking were always welcome guests in the mansion of Mr. Thornton. Both, however, were large-hearted men, and wherever they met with undoubted piety, whether in a Calvinist or an Arminian brother, they were thankful and glad.

No record of the "friendly interview" between Fletcher and Walter Shirley now exists; but, bearing in mind the position which Mr. Shirley occupied, there cannot be a doubt that the result of their "interview" would be considerable, and in harmony with the object at which Fletcher was now strenuously aiming.

The task which Fletcher undertook was arduous, and he knew it. He writes :—

"Some persons will urge that truth should never be sacrificed to love and peace; that the Calvinists and the Arminians holding doctrines diametrically opposite, one party, at least, must be totally in the wrong; and, as the other party ought not to be reconciled to error, the agreement, I propose, is impossible: it will never take place, unless the Calvinists can be prevailed upon to give up unconditional election, and their favourite doctrines of partial grace; or the Arminians can be persuaded to part with conditional election, and their favourite doctrines of impartial justice; and as this is too great a sacrifice to be expected from either party, it is in vain to attempt bringing about a reconciliation between them.

---

[1] The Rev. Walter Shirley.

"This objection is weighty; but, far from discouraging me, it affords me an opportunity of laying before my readers the ground of the hope I entertain, to reconcile the Calvinists and the Arminians. I should, indeed, utterly despair of effecting it, were I obliged to prove that either party is entirely in the wrong; but I expect some success, because my grand design is to demonstrate that both parties have an important truth on their side."

Fletcher proceeds to give his own view on the Calvinian side of the question, as follows:—

"The partial election and reprobation of free grace is the gracious and wise choice which God, as a sovereign and arbitrary Benefactor, makes or refuses to make of some persons, churches, cities, and nations, to bestow upon them, for His own mercy's sake, more favours than He does upon others. It is the partiality with which He imparts His talents of nature, providence, and grace, to His creatures or servants; giving five talents to some, two to others, and one to others; not only without respect to their works, or acquired worthiness of any sort, but frequently in opposition to all personal demerit."

This admirable definition of a sound doctrine is sustained by references to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and other Old Testament personages; also to the cities of Jerusalem, Chorazin, and Bethsaida; to the countries of Egypt, Judea, Syria, and England, etc.

Then, turning to the Arminian side of the controversy, Fletcher gives the following equally correct definition:—

"The impartial election and reprobation of justice is the righteous and wise choice which God, as an equitable and unbribed Judge, makes, or refuses to make, of some persons, churches, cities, and nations, judicially to bestow upon them, for Christ's sake, gracious rewards, according to His evangelical promises; or judicially to inflict upon them, for righteousness' sake, condign punishments, according to His reasonable threatenings."

This definition is also supported by a large number of Scripture examples, showing Fletcher's perfect knowledge of the holy books. He then writes:—

"Rigid Calvinists and rigid Arminians are both in the wrong; the former in obscuring the doctrines of impartial justice, and the latter in clouding the doctrines of partial grace. But moderate Calvinists and candid Arminians are very near each other, and very near the truth; the difference there is between them being more owing to confusion, want of proper explanation, and misapprehension of each other's sentiments, than to any real, inimical opposition to the truth, or to one another."

Fletcher next propounds his "Plan of Reconciliation."

First of all, he adduces the well-known plan of union, which Wesley, thirteen years before, had ineffectually proposed to the evangelical clergymen of the Church of England, including Romaine, Shirley, Newton, Venn, and Berridge; after which he proceeds to observe:—

"I do not see why such a plan might not be, in some degree, admitted by all the ministers of the Gospel, whether they belong to or dissent from the Establishment. I would extend my brotherly love to all Christians in general, but more particularly to all Protestants, and most particularly to all the Protestants of the Established Church; but God forbid that I should exclude from my brotherly affection, and occasional assistance, any true minister of Christ, because he casts the Gospel net among the Presbyterians, the Independents, the Quakers, or the Baptists! So far as they cordially aim at the conversion of sinners, I will offer them the right hand of fellowship, and communicate with them in spirit. Might not good men and sincere ministers form themselves into a Society of reconcilers, whatever be their denomination and mode of worship? There is a Society for promoting religious knowledge among the poor; some of its members are Churchmen and others Dissenters; some are Calvinists and others Arminians; and yet it flourishes, and the design of it is happily answered. Might not such a Society be formed for promoting peace and love among professors? Is not charity preferable to knowledge? There is another respectable Society for promoting the Christian faith among the heathen; and why should there not be a Society for promoting unanimity and toleration among Christians? Ought not the welfare of our fellow-Christians to lie as near our hearts as that of the heathen?

"Many gentlemen, some laymen and others clergymen, some Churchmen and others Dissenters, wanted lately to procure the repeal of our articles of religion. Notwithstanding the diversity of their employments, principles, and denominations, they united, wrote circular letters, drew up petitions, and used all their interest with men in power to bring about their design. Again, some warm men thought it proper to blow up the fire of discontent in the breasts of our American fellow-subjects. How did they go about the dangerous work? With what ardour did they speak and write, preach and print, fast and pray, publish manifestoes and make them circulate, associate and strengthen their associations, and at last venture their fortunes, reputations, and lives, in the execution of their warlike project! Go, ye men of peace, and do at least half as much to carry on your friendly design. Associate, pray, preach, and print for the furtherance of peace.

"Might not moderate Calvinists send, with success, circular letters to their rigid Calvinian brethren; and moderate Arminians to their rigid Arminian brethren, to check rashness and recommend meekness, moderation, and love? Might not the Calvinist ministers who patronise the doctrines of grace display also the doctrines of justice, and open their pulpits to those Arminian ministers who do it with caution? And might not the Arminian ministers, who patronise the doctrines of justice, make more of the doctrines of grace, preach as nearly as they can like the judicious Calvinists, admit them into their pulpits, and rejoice at every opportunity of showing them their esteem and confidence? Might not such moderate Calvinists and Arminians as live in the same towns, have from time to time a general sacrament, and invite one another to it, to cement brotherly love by publicly confessing the same Christ, by jointly taking Him for their common head, and by acknowledging one another as fellow-members of His mystical body?

"The sin of the want of union with our pious Calvinian or Arminian brethren is attended with peculiar aggravations. We are not only fellow-creatures, but fellow-subjects, fellow-Christians, fellow-Protestants, and fellow-sufferers, in reputation at least, for maintaining the capital doctrines of salvation by faith in Christ, and of regeneration by the Spirit of God. How absurd is it for persons, who thus share in the reproach, patience, and kingdom of Christ, to embitter each other's comforts, and add to the load of contempt, which the men of the world cast upon them! Let Pagans, Mahometans, Jews, Papists, and Deists do this work. We may reasonably expect it from them. But for such Calvinists and Arminians as the world lumps together under the name of Methodists, on account of their peculiar profession of godliness,—for such companions in tribulation to 'bite and devour' each other is highly unreasonable and peculiarly scandalous."

In such a spirit did the Arminian polemic address his Calvinian opponents. The following is extracted from his concluding remarks:—

"God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither bond nor free, neither Calvinist nor Arminian, but Christ is all in all. Grant me my humble, perhaps my dying request, reject not my plea for peace. If it be not strong, it is earnest; for, considering my bodily weakness, I write it at the hazard of my life: *animamque in vulnere pono*.

"But why should I drop a hint about so insignificant a life, when I can move you to accept of terms of reconciliation by the life and death, by the resurrection and ascension, of our Lord Jesus Christ. I recall the frivolous hint; and, by the unknown agonies of Him whom you love, by His second coming, and by our gathering together unto Him, I beseech you, put on, as the Protestant 'elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; even as Christ loved and forgave you, so do ye.' Instead of absurdly charging one another with heresy, embrace one another, and triumph together in Christ. Bless God, ye Arminians, for raising such men as the pious Calvinists, to make a firm stand against Pharisaic delusions, and to maintain, with you, the doctrine of man's fallen state, and of God's partial grace, which the Pelagians attack with all their might. And, ye Calvinists, rejoice that heaven has raised you such allies as the godly Arminians, to oppose Manichean delusions, and to contend for the doctrines of holiness and justice, which the Antinomians seem sworn to destroy. Pharisaism will never yield but to the power of Bible-Calvinism and the doctrines of grace. Nor can Antinomianism be conquered without the help of Bible-Arminianism and the doctrines of justice. When Pharisaism and Antinomianism shall be destroyed, the Church will be sanctified, and ready to be presented to Christ a glorious Church, 'not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.' Then shall we sing with truth what we now sing without propriety,—

"'Love, like death, has all destroy'd,
Render'd all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall,
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.'"

Nothing more need be said respecting Fletcher's praiseworthy effort to put an end to the contentions then so rampant. No doubt, his object, to some extent, was realized; but, for many a long year afterwards, not a few of the Calvinists and Arminians bore a striking resemblance to the ancient Jews and Samaritans. They worshipped the same God, but did not love each other.

Fletcher spent four months, from December 16, 1776, to April 16, 1777, in the hospitable home of his Methodist friends, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Greenwood, at Stoke Newington; and never did he forget their remarkable kindness to him. Here he wrote a long pastoral letter to his parishioners on December 28, 1776; and, sixteen days afterwards, another, from which the following extracts are taken:—

"NEWINGTON, *January* 13, 1777.

"MY DEAR COMPANIONS IN TRIBULATION,—All the children of God I love; but, of all the children of God, none have so great a right to my love as you. Your stated or occasional attendance on my poor ministry, as well as the bonds of neighbourhood, and the many happy hours I have spent with you before the throne of grace, endear you peculiarly to me.

"With tears of grateful joy, I recollect the awful moments when we have bound ourselves to stand to our baptismal vow: to renounce all sin, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and to keep God's commandments to the end of our life. Asking pardon of God for not keeping that vow better, I determine, with new courage and delight, to love our *Covenant God*,[1] Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with all my mind, heart, and strength; with all the powers of my understanding, will, and affections.

"In my weak state of health, I find much comfort from my relation to my *Covenant God*: I mean (1) My clear, explicit knowledge of the Father as my Creator and Father; who so loved the world, you and me, as to give His only-begotten Son, that we should not perish, but have everlasting life. (2) I mean my relation to the adorable Person, who, with the strength of His Godhead, and the strength of His pure manhood, took away my sin. O how my soul exults in that dear Mediator! O the comfort of cleaving to Christ by faith, and of finding Christ is our all in all!

"I sometimes feel a desire of being buried where you are buried, and of having my bones lie in a common earthen bed with yours; but I soon resign that wish, and exult in thinking that, whatever distance there may be between our graves, we can now bury our sins, cares, doubts, and fears, in the one grave of our divine Saviour. If I, your poor unworthy shepherd, am smitten, be not scattered; but rather be more closely gathered unto Christ, and keep near each other in faith and love, till you all receive our second Comforter and Advocate, the Holy Ghost, the third Person in our *Covenant God*. He is with you; but, if you plead the promise of the Father, 'which,' says Christ, 'you have heard of me, He will be *in* you.' He will fill your souls with His light, love, and glory, according to that verse, which we have so often sung together,—

"'Refining fire, go through my heart,
  Illuminate my soul,
Scatter thy life through every part,
  And sanctify the whole.'

"This indwelling of the Comforter perfects the mystery of sanctification in the believer's soul. This is the highest blessing of the Christian covenant on earth. Rejoicing in God our Creator, in God our Redeemer, let us look for the full comfort of God our Sanctifier. So shall we live and die in the faith, going on from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from comfort to comfort, till Christ is all in all to us all.

"I earnestly recommend to you my dear brother Greaves. Show him all the love you have shown to me, and, if possible, show him more, who is so much more deserving."[2]

---

[1] Wesley had held, in London, the usual "Covenant Service," on Wednesday, January 1st. Probably, Fletcher had attended it, and, perhaps, taken part in it.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 30.

The letter from which these extracts are taken was forwarded to the care of Mr. Wase, who, probably, was a Methodist Local Preacher. Mr. Wase wished to be employed by the Church of England in America. Fletcher disapproved of this. Hence the following to Mr. Wase, written on the same day as the pastoral letter to the parishioners of Madeley. In fact, the pastoral letter was appended to it.

"NEWINGTON, *January* 13, 1777.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I am two letters in your debt. I would have answered them before now, but, venturing to ride out in the frost, the air was too sharp for my weak lungs, and opened my wounds, which has thrown me back again.

"I am glad to see, by your last, that you take up your shield again. You will never prove a gainer by casting it away. Voluntary humility, despondency, or even a defeat, should never make you give up your confidence.

"Take no hasty steps about removing. Your family and estate seem to me to tie you where you are, unless you have a very striking call to remove. You must not be above being employed in a little way. The great Mr. Grimshaw" (of Haworth) "was not above walking some miles to preach to seven or eight persons; and what are we when compared to him? Our neighbours will want you more when Mr. Greaves and I are gone. In the meantime, grow in meek, humble, patient, and resigned love; and your temper, person, and labours will be more acceptable to all around you. I saw last week a gentleman from America, who said, all the church-livings there are in the gift of the Governor; and those who get them are brought up at the American Colleges, and come over for ordination to the Bishop of London. Supposing the peace were made, and missionaries were wanted, you might be employed in America; but of the latter I see little prospect; and you need not seek trials beyond the seas, seeing yours at home are as much as you can stand under.

"I have many things to say to you about your soul; but you will find the substance of them in two of Mr. Wesley's sermons, the one entitled, 'The Devices of Satan,' and the other, 'The Repentance of Believers.' I wish you would read one of them every day, till you have reaped all the benefit that can be got from them. Nor eat your morsel alone, but let all be benefited by the contents.

"When you meet with our serious friends at Broseley, Madeley, Madeley Wood, the Dale, Dawley-Green, Wheater, Aston, Sheriff-Hales, and the two Banks, give my kindest love to them, and read them the following scrawl.[1]

---

[1] The Pastoral Letter already mentioned. The places here named were, probably, Fletcher's *Methodist* Circuit, in each of which Methodist Societies had been formed.

"My kind love to Mrs. Wase, and all your and my friends by name. Thank Michael Onions, and I. Owen; I shall answer their letters when I can, if God spare me.

"Your affectionate brother,
"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The good "Archbishop of Methodism," the Rev. Vincent Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, Kent, and his noble daughter, invited Fletcher to visit them; to whom Fletcher replied in the two following letters:—

"NEWINGTON, *January* 19, 1777.

"DEAR FATHER IN CHRIST,—I beg you to accept my multiplied thanks for your repeated favours. You have twice entertained me, a worthless stranger; and, not yet tired of the burden, you again kindly invite me to share in the comforts of your house and family. Kind Providence leaves me no room, at present, to hang a third burden upon you. The good air and accommodations here, and the nearness to a variety of helps, joined to the kindness of my friends and the weakness of my body, forbid me to remove at present. God reward your labour of love and fatherly offers! Should the Lord raise me up, I shall be better able to reap the benefit of your instructions, a pleasure which I promise myself some time, if the Lord pleases.

"I have of late thought much upon a method of reconciling the Calvinists and Arminians. I have seen some Calvinian ministers, who seem inclined to a plan of pacification. I wish I had strength enough to draw the sketch of it for you. I think the thing is by no means impracticable, if we would but look one another in the face, and pull together at the feet of Him 'who makes men to be of one mind in a house,' and who once made all believers to be of one soul in the Church. Let us pray, hope, wait, and be ready to promote the blessing of reconciliation; in which none could be more glad to second you, than, honoured and dear Sir, your affectionate, obliged son in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

In another letter, soon to be introduced, it will be seen that, among the "Calvinian ministers," whom Fletcher had seen, were the Rev. Walter Shirley, the Rev. Rowland Hill, and the Rev. Dr. Peckwell.

In his letter to Miss Perronet, Fletcher dwells upon the great truth which then filled his mind and heart, and which was the chief topic of his conversation with his friends,—the mission of the Spirit, and His sanctifying work. It was written on the same day as the letter to her father:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 23; and *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1846, p. 141.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 239.

"NEWINGTON, *January* 19, 1777.

"DEAR MADAM,—I thank you for your care and kind nursing of me when at Shoreham; and, especially, for the few lines with which you have favoured me. They are so much the more agreeable to me, as they treat of the one thing needful for the recovery of our souls,—'the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind;' together with our need of it, and the grand promise that this need shall be abundantly supplied,—supplied by an outpouring of that 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death.' May we hunger and thirst after righteousness in the Holy Ghost, and we shall be filled! May we so come to our first Paraclete, Advocate, and Comforter, as to receive the Second, as an *indwelling and overflowing fountain* of light, life, and love!

"I trust my view of this mystery is scriptural. The Father so loved the world as to give us the first Advocate, Paraclete, and Comforter, whom we love and receive as our Redeemer. The first Advocate has told us, it was expedient that He should leave us, because, in that case, He would send another Advocate, Paraclete, or Comforter, to *abide with us*, and be *in us* for ever, as our *Sanctifier*, our Urim and Thummim, *our lights and perfections*, our oracle and guide. This is the grand promise to Christians,—called *the promise of the Father*, and brought by the Son. O may it be sealed on our hearts by *the Spirit of promise!* May we ever cry—

"'Seal thou our breasts, and let us wear
That pledge of love for ever there!'

"Then shall we be filled with pure, perfect love; for the love of the Spirit perfects that of the Father and Son, and accomplishes the mystery of God in the believing soul.

"Come then, let us look for it; this great salvation draws nigh. Let us thank God more thankfully, more joyfully, more humbly, more penitently, for Christ our first Comforter; and, hanging on His word, let us ardently pray for the *fulness* of His Spirit,—for the indwelling of our second Comforter, who will lead us into all truth, all love, all power. Let us join the few who *besiege* the throne of grace, and not cease putting the Lord in remembrance, till He has again raised Himself a *Pentecostal Church* in the earth,—I mean a church of such believers as are all of one heart and one soul."[1]

Fletcher's friends were most ardently attached to him; and no wonder that they were. The man seemed to be an incarnation of humble, loving piety. All, in his serious illness, were eager to help him. Ten days after the date of his letters to Mr. and Miss Perronet, he wrote, as follows, to Mr. Ireland :—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 240.

"NEWINGTON, *January* 29, 1777.

"Thanks be to God, and to my dear friend, for favours upon favours, for undeserved love and the most endearing tokens of it!

"I have received your obliging letters, full of kind offers; and your jar, full of excellent grapes. May God open to you the book of life, and seal upon your heart all the offers and promises it contains! May the treasures of Christ's love, and all the fruits of the Spirit, be open to my dear friend, and unwearied benefactor!

"Last Sunday, Providence sent me Dr. Turner, who, under God, saved my life, twenty-three years ago, in a dangerous illness; and I am inclined to try what *his* method will do. He orders me asses' milk, chicken, etc.; forbids me riding, and recommends the greatest quietness. He prohibits the use of Bristol water; advises some water of a purgative nature; and tries to promote expectoration by a method that so far answers, though I spit by it more blood than before.

"With respect to my soul, I find it good to be in the balance,—awfully weighed every day for life or death. I thank God, the latter has lost its sting, and endears to me the Prince of Life. But O! I want Christ, my resurrection, to be a thousand times more dear to me; and I doubt not He will be so, when I am *filled* with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Let us wait for that glory, praising God for all we have received, and trusting Him for all we have not yet received. Let our faith do justice to His veracity; our hope to His goodness; and our love to all His perfections. It is good to trust in the Lord; and His saints like well to hope in Him.

"I am provided here with every necessary and convenient blessing for my state. The great have done me the honour of calling,—Mr. Shirley, Mr. Rowland Hill, Mr. Peckwell, etc.[1] I exhort them to promote peace in the Church, which they take kindly. Lady Huntingdon also has written me a kind letter. This world to me is now become a *world of love*."[2]

Madeley was the centre of a kind of Methodist circuit, which, however, had no Methodist meeting-house. Services were held in cottages; chapels did not exist. In the midst of his affliction, Fletcher and his friends projected the building of one in Madeley Wood.[1] As will be seen in subsequent letters, the execution of the scheme brought upon him considerable anxiety. Robert Palmer was the builder, and the entire cost was £296 17*s.* 5*d.*, including £1 4*s.* 2*d.* "paid for drink for the men with the teams," and £3 12*s.* paid for "sixteen stones of malt, for drink for the workmen."[2] The following letter, addressed to Mr. Wase, refers to this humble edifice:—

---

[1] Berridge, of Everton, also came to Fletcher at Stoke Newington. "They met and parted in the spirit of Christian love; and I believe saw each other no more in the body." (The Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M.; with a Memoir of his Life, by Rev. R. Whittingham, p. 63.)

Another, who visited him, was Dr. Price, who, afterwards, said, "I was introduced to the company of a man, whose air and countenance bespoke him fitted rather for the society of angels, than for the conversation of men." (Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 114.)

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 242.

"NEWINGTON, *February* 18, 1777.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—My dear friend Ireland brought me, last week, Sir John Elliott, who is esteemed the greatest physician in London, in consumptive cases. He gave hopes of my recovery, upon using proper diet and means. I was bled yesterday for the third time. I calmly leave all to God, and use the means without trusting in them. Death has lost its sting. I know not what hurry of spirit is, or unbelieving fears, under my most terrifying symptoms. Glory be to God, for this unspeakable mercy! Help me to praise Him for it.

"With respect to our intended room, I beg Mr. Palmer, Mr. Lloyd, and yourself to consult about it, and that Mr. Palmer would contract for the whole. I shall contribute £100, including £10 I have had for it from Mr. Ireland, and £10 from Mr. Thornton."[3]

In other ways, Fletcher evinced his profound interest in the welfare of his Madeley friends. Mr. Greaves occupied his pulpit, and preached, with great acceptance, to his parishioners; but Mr. Greaves was not a priest, and, therefore, was not qualified to administer the holy sacraments. To meet the case, Fletcher wrote as follows to the Bishop of Hereford:—

"STOKE NEWINGTON, *March* 22, 1777.

"MY LORD,—It is near a year since I was taken ill with a cough, spitting of blood, and hectic fever. This complication of disorders obliged me to go to Bristol last summer, for the benefit of the waters;

---

[1] The chapel was enlarged a short time before Fletcher's death in 1785. On the morning of the day when his friends began to hew the stones for the enlargement, he went to the quarry, and said, "First of all, let us pray." The workers knelt upon the rock; Fletcher prayed in a way that few besides himself could pray; and then, till duty called him elsewhere, assisted in shaping the stones for the extension of the building. (Crowther's "Portraiture of Methodism," p. 96.)

[2] MS. in Fletcher's own handwriting.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 24.

and it now detains me here, where I stay on account of the greater mildness of the climate, and the help I can have from the London physicians, who, as well as those of Bristol, absolutely forbid me doing duty.

"It is with great difficulty that I have got my church properly served. My chief assistant has been Mr. Greaves, a young clergyman of the next diocese, who is only in deacon's orders, and who, considering my weak state of health, has kindly left his curacy to oblige and help me. I give him a title, and do humbly recommend him to your lordship, begging you would admit him to the holy order of priest; without which he cannot properly supply my church, my parishioners having always been used to a monthly sacrament, and dying people, in so populous a part of the diocese, frequently wanting to have the ordinance administered to them.

"I am sorry to be obliged to trouble your lordship on this occasion; but hope, my lord, you will not deny me a favour which few clergymen in your lordship's diocese can want as much as your lordship's dutiful son and obedient servant,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

With this letter, Fletcher sent the following certificate:—

"To the Right Reverend Father in God, James Lord Bishop of Hereford.

"These are to certify to your lordship that I, John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, in the county of Salop and your lordship's diocese of Hereford, do hereby nominate and appoint Alexander Benjamin Greaves, late Curate of Glossop, in Derbyshire, to perform the office of a Curate in my church of Madeley aforesaid; and do promise to allow him the yearly sum of £42 for his maintenance in the same; and to continue him to officiate in my said church until he shall be otherwise provided of some ecclesiastical preferment, unless, by fault by him committed, he shall be lawfully removed from the same. And I hereby solemnly declare that I do not fraudulently give this certificate to entitle the said Alexander Benjamin Greaves to receive Holy Orders, but with a real intention to employ him in my said church, according to what is before expressed.

"Witness my hand this twenty-second day of March, in the year of our Lord 1777,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

The Perronet family at Shoreham dearly loved poor Fletcher. He had been their guest, and they had seen his spirit. Damaris Perronet was occasionally one of his correspondents; and William Perronet was now his loving medical attendant. The saintly Charles Perronet had died in the month of August, 1776, but was most tenderly remembered by all who knew him. To Miss Perronet, Fletcher now wrote as follows:—

---

[1] Unpublished MS.
[2] *Ibid.*

"NEWINGTON, *April* 21, 1777.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—A thousand thanks to you for your kind, comfortable lines. The prospect of going to see Jesus and His glorified members, and among them your dear departed brother, my now *ever-living friend*, is enough to make me quietly and joyfully submit to leave all my Shoreham friends, and all the excellent ones of the earth. But why do I talk of leaving any of Christ's members by going to be more intimately united to the Head?

"'We all are one who Him receive,
And each with each agree;
In Him the *One*, the *truth* we live,
Blest *point* of unity!'

"A point this which fills heaven and earth, which runs through time and eternity. In it sickness is lost in health, and death in life. There let us ever meet.

"I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to your dear brother for all his kind brotherly attendance as a physician. He has given me his time, his long walks, his remedies. He has brought me Dr. Turner several times, and will not allow me to reimburse his expenses. Help me to thank him for all his profusion of love, for I cannot sufficiently do it myself.

"My duty to your father; I throw myself in spirit at his feet and ask his blessing, and an interest in his prayers. Tell him that the Lord is gracious to me; does not suffer the enemy to disturb my peace; and gives me, in prospect, the victory over death. *Absolute resignation* to the Divine will baffles a thousand temptations, and *confidence* in our Saviour carries us sweetly through a thousand trials."[1]

The time of Fletcher's happy sojourn with Mr. and Mrs. Greenwood at Stoke Newington was now ended. One of the family wrote:—

"When he first came, he was, by Dr. Fothergill's advice, under the strictest observance of two things—rest and silence. These, together with a milk diet, were supposed to be the only probable means of his recovery. In consequence of these directions, he spoke exceeding little. If ever he spoke more than usual, it did not fail to increase his spitting of blood, of which indeed he was seldom quite clear, although it was not violent. Therefore, a great part of his time was spent in being read to; but it was not possible to restrain him altogether from speaking.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 246.

His natural vivacity, with his intense love of Jesus, impelled him to speak; but on being reminded of his rule, with a cheerful smile he was all submission, consenting by signs only to stir up those about him to pray and praise. Those who had the privilege of observing his spirit and conduct, will not scruple to say that he was a living comment on his own account of Christian perfection. When he was able to converse, his favourite subject was, *the promise of the Father*, *the gift of the Holy Ghost*, including the rich peculiar blessing of union with the Father and the Son, mentioned in the prayer of our Lord, recorded in John xvii. 'We must not be content,' said he, 'to be only cleansed from sin; we must be filled with the Spirit.' One asking him, What was to be experienced in the full accomplishment of *the promise* of the Father? 'O,' said he, 'what shall I say? All the sweetness of the drawings of the Father, all the love of the Son, all the rich effusions of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, more than ever can be expressed are comprehended here! To attain it, the Spirit maketh intercession in the soul, like a God wrestling with a God.'

"In some of these favoured moments of converse, he mentioned several circumstances, which, as none knew them but himself, would otherwise have been buried in oblivion. 'In the beginning,' said he, 'of my spiritual course, I heard the voice of God in an articulate, but inexpressibly awful sound, go through my soul in those words, *If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself.* At a later date, I was favoured, like Moses, with a supernatural discovery of the glory of God, in an ineffable converse with Him, face to face; so that whether I was then in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell.'

"On another occasion he said, 'About the time of my entering into the ministry, I one evening wandered into a wood, musing on the importance of the office I was going to undertake. I then began to pour out my soul in prayer; when such a sense of the justice of God fell upon me, and such a sense of His displeasure at sin, as absorbed all my powers, and filled me with the agony of prayer for poor lost sinners. I continued therein till the dawn of day; and I considered this as designed of God, to impress upon me more deeply the meaning of those solemn words, *Therefore, knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.*'

"One end of his retiring to Newington was that he might hide himself from company; but this design was in nowise answered, for company came from every side. He was continually visited by high and low, and by persons of various denominations; one of whom being asked, when he went away, what he thought of Mr. Fletcher, said, 'I went to see a man who had one foot in the grave; but I found a man who had one foot in heaven.' Among them who now visited him were several of his beloved and honoured opponents, to whom he confirmed his love by the most respectful and affectionate behaviour; but he did not give up any part of the truth for which he had publicly contended; although some, from whom one would have expected better things, did not scruple to affirm the contrary.

"It was not without some difficulty that Mr. Ireland prevailed upon him to sit for his picture. While the limner was drawing the outlines of it he was exhorting both him and all that were in the room not only to get the outlines drawn, but the colourings also of the image of Jesus on their hearts. He had a very remarkable facility in making allusions of this kind. To give an instance. Being ordered to be let blood, while his blood was running into the cup he took occasion to expatiate on the precious blood-shedding of the Lamb of God. And even when he did not speak at all, the seraphic spirit which beamed from his languid face, during those months of pain and weakness, was—

"'A lecture silent, yet of sovereign use.'"

To this interesting account, probably written by Mr. Greenwood himself, Wesley adds:—

"It is necessary to be observed that this facility of raising useful observations from the most trifling incidents, was one of those peculiarities in Mr. Fletcher which cannot be proposed to our imitation. In him, it partly resulted from nature, and was partly a supernatural gift. But what was becoming and graceful in Mr. Fletcher, would be disgustful almost in any other."[1]

In the month of May, 1777, Fletcher left the hospitable home of Mr. Greenwood, at Stoke Newington, and went to his kind friend Mr. Ireland, at Brislington, near Bristol. In a letter dated "May 28, 1777," and addressed to his "very dear friends and benefactors Charles and Mary Greenwood," he wrote:—

"I thought myself a little better last Sunday, but I have since spit more blood than I had done for weeks before. Glory be to God for every providence! His will be done in me by health or sickness, by life or death! All from Him is, and I trust will always be, welcome to your obliged pensioner,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

To Michael Onions, one of the poor Methodists at Coalbrookdale, Fletcher wrote:—

"BATH, *July* 8, 1777.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I heartily thank you for your kind letter; and, by you, I desire to give my best thanks to the dear companions in tribulation whom you meet, and who so kindly remember me. If I should be spared to minister to you again, my desire is to do it with more humility, zeal, diligence, and love. I hope to see you before the summer is ended, if it please God to give me strength for the journey. I am, in some respects, better than when I came here, and was enabled to bury a corpse last Sunday to oblige the minister of the parish; but, whether occasioned by that little exertion or something else, bad symptoms have returned since. Be that as it may, all is well; for He, who does all things well, rules and over-rules all.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 248.

"I have stood the heats we have had these two days better than I expected. I desire you will help me to bless the Author of all good for this and every other blessing of this life; but above all for the lively hope of the next, and for Christ, our common hope, peace, joy, wisdom, righteousness, salvation, and all. Don't let me want the reviving cordial of hearing that you stand together firm in the faith. Look much at Jesus. Be much in private prayer. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together in little companies, as well as in public. Walk in the sight of death and eternity, and ever pray for your affectionate, but unworthy minister,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

"P.S.—Let none of your little companies want. If any do, you are welcome to my house. Take any part of the furniture there, and make use of it for their relief. And this shall be your full title for so doing,

"Witness my hand, JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

At this time, the Rev. Henry Venn was preaching in the chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon at Bath; and Fletcher attended his ministry. Her ladyship wrote:—

"Dear Mr. Venn has been preaching most successfully at Bath to overflowing congregations. Captain Scott and Mr. Fletcher have been there, and heard him preach in the chapel. The latter is far gone in a consumptive disorder, but is alive to God, and ripening fast for glory. We have exchanged several letters lately. As a last resource, he is to accompany Mr. Ireland to the south of France."[3]

When Mr. Venn had completed his services at Bath, he removed to the house of Mr. Ireland, at Brislington, where Fletcher was an honoured guest. Speaking of this visit, after Fletcher's death, to a brother clergyman, Venn remarked:—

"Sir, Mr. Fletcher was a luminary—a *luminary* did I say? He was a *sun!* I have known all the great men for these fifty years, but I have known none like him. I was intimately acquainted with him, and was under the same roof with him once for six weeks; during which time I never heard him say a single word which was not proper to be spoken, and which had not a tendency to minister grace to the hearers. One time, meeting him when he was very ill, I said, 'I am sorry to find you so ill.' Mr. Fletcher answered, with the greatest sweetness, 'Sorry, Sir, why are you sorry? It is the chastisement of our heavenly Father, and I rejoice in it. I love the rod of my God, and rejoice therein as an expression of His love towards me.' Never," continued Mr. Venn, "did I hear Mr. Fletcher speak ill of any one. He would pray for those who walked disorderly, but he would not publish their faults."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 26.
[2] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."
[3] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 71.

In a letter to the Rev. J. Stillingfleet, Mr. Venn remarked:—

"I have been six weeks with the extraordinary and very excellent Mr. Fletcher. Oh that I might be like him! I strictly observed him, but, I assure you, I never heard him speak anything but what was becoming a pastor of Christ's Church;—not a single unbecoming word of himself, or of his antagonists, or of his friends. All his conversation tended to excite to greater love and thankfulness, for the benefits of redemption; whilst his whole deportment breathed humility and love. We had many conversations. I told him, most freely, that I was shocked at many things in his 'Checks;' and pointed them out to him. We widely differ about the efficacy of Christ's death, the nature of justification, and the perfection of the saints; but I believe we could live years together, as we did, in great love. He heard me twice; and I was chaplain both morning and evening in the family, as his lungs would not suffer him to speak long or loud. He desired his love, by me, to all his Calvinistic brethren; and begged their pardon for the asperity with which he had written. I am persuaded, as I told him, that, if he were to live with some of those whom he has been taught to conceive of as Antinomians, and hear them preach, he would be much more reconciled to them."[2]

Mr. Venn's last remarks were quite unneeded, for Fletcher always readily allowed that the hearts and lives of his opponents were far better than their creed.

At the close of the month of July, Wesley came to Bristol, to hold his annual conference with his preachers, and wrote:—

"Wednesday, July 30. I spent an hour or two with Mr. Fletcher, restored to life in answer to many prayers. How many providential ends have been answered by his illness! And perhaps still greater will be answered by his recovery."[3]

The "providential ends" meant by Wesley were, probably, the steps taken by Fletcher to bring to an end the Calvinian controversy, which had so greatly disturbed the Methodist movement during the last six years.

---

[1] "Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 72.

[2] "Life of Rev. Henry Venn, M.A.," p. 240.

[3] Wesley's Journal.

Wesley's conference began on Tuesday, August 5, and ended on Friday, August 8.[1] It was short, but important. Its most interesting event, however, was the attendance of Fletcher. Thomas Taylor remarked, in his unpublished diary,—

> "On August 7, that great and good man Mr. Fletcher came into the conference. My eyes flowed with tears at the sight of him. He spoke to us in a very respectful manner, and took a solemn farewell. Dear, good man! I never saw so many tears shed in my life."

Fletcher's valued friend, Joseph Benson, wrote:—

> "August 8. We have had an edifying conference. Mr. Fletcher's visit to-day and yesterday has been attended with a blessing. His appearance, his exhortations, and his prayers, broke most of our hearts, and filled us with shame and self-abasement, for our little improvement."[2]

In his "Life of Fletcher," Benson says:—

> "Mr. Fletcher happened to be passing by the door of the stable, belonging to our chapel in Broadmead, when I was lighting from my horse, 'on my arrival in Bristol.' I shall never forget with what a heavenly air, and sweet countenance, he instantly came to me in the stable, and, in a most solemn manner, put his hands upon my head, as if he had been ordaining me for the sacred office of the ministry, and prayed most fervently for and blessed me in the name of the Lord."

By far the best account, however, of Fletcher in connection with the Bristol Conference, was written, not by one of Wesley's sturdy Itinerants, but by a young Welshman, who was present, for the purpose of offering himself for the Itinerant work. On account of his delicate health and feeble voice, the offer of David Lloyd was not accepted; but, some years afterwards, he was ordained by Bishop Horsley, who gave him the living of Llanbister, which, even now, is not worth more than £150 a year. The parsonage was a plain stone building, the door of which opened into the main room of the house,—its floor consisting of stone slabs, its fireplace wide, with benches in the corners, and the fire on the hearth made principally of turf. On the same floor was another apartment, which served as kitchen, and above were two humble bed-rooms. "Such," wrote the late Rev. James Dixon, D.D., who, at the commencement of his ministry, was often the delighted guest of Mr. Lloyd,—"Such was the residence of a philosopher, a poet, and a divine, who seemed to enjoy, with unmixed contentment, the inheritance given him by Providence." Mr. Lloyd's wife was a good old Methodist; their house was the home of Methodist itinerant preachers; out of his small income, Mr. Lloyd subscribed £10 a year to the Methodist and Church Missionary Societies; presented to each a donation of £500; by his will, directed that the residue of his property should be equally divided between these two Societies; and built a Methodist chapel in his parish, secured it to the Connexion by deed, and gave to it an endowment, "that Methodist preaching," as he said, "might continue in the parish as long as water should run."[1]

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.
[2] Macdonald's "Life of Benson," p. 62.

This remarkable man, for whom Dr. Dixon had the highest admiration, wrote as follows to the Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke:—

"LLANBISTER, NEAR KNIGHTON, RADNORSHIRE,
"*November* 7, 1821.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—At the conference of the Methodist preachers, held at Bristol in the year 1777, an interview took place between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and the Rev. John Fletcher, of Madeley. I was both an eye- and ear-witness to the facts I here relate. The Rev. Mr. Fletcher had for a long time laboured under the effects of a deep-rooted consumption, which was then adjudged to be rapidly advancing to its final crisis. He was advised by the faculty to make the tour of the Continent, and to breathe his native air. He resided, at that time, with Mr. Ireland, a gentleman of known celebrity for the exercise of catholic love towards all such as possessed the essential attributes of great and good men. On the forenoon of a day, when the sitting of the Conference was drawing to a close, tidings announced the approach of Mr. Fletcher. As he entered the vestibule of the New Room, supported by Mr. Ireland, I can never forget the visible impulse of esteem which his venerable presence excited in the house. The whole assembly stood up, as if moved by an electric shock. Mr. Wesley rose, *ex cathedrâ*, and advanced a few paces to receive his highly respected friend and reverend brother, whose visage seemed strongly to bode that he stood on the verge of the grave; while his eyes, sparkling with seraphic love, indicated that he dwelt in the suburbs of heaven. In this his languid but happy state, he addressed the Conference, on their work and his own views, in a strain of holy and pathetic eloquence, which no language of mine can adequately express. The influence of his spirit and pathos seemed to bear down all before it. I never saw such an instantaneous effect produced in a religious assembly, either before or since. He had scarcely pronounced a dozen sentences before a hundred preachers, to speak in round numbers, were immersed in tears. Time can never efface from my mind the recollection and image of what I then felt and saw. Such a scene I never expect to witness again on this side eternity. Mr. Wesley, in order to relieve his languid friend from the fatigue and injury which might arise from a too long and arduous exertion of the lungs through much speaking, abruptly kneeled down at his side, the whole congress of preachers doing the same, while, in a concise and energetic manner, he prayed for Mr. Fletcher's restoration to health and a longer exercise of his ministerial labours. Mr. Wesley closed his prayer with the following prophetic promise, pronounced in his peculiar manner, and with a confidence and emphasis which seemed to thrill through every heart, 'HE SHALL NOT DIE, BUT LIVE, AND DECLARE THE WORKS OF THE LORD.' The event verified the prediction. Mr. Fletcher lived for eight succeeding years, exerting all the zeal of a primitive missionary, and enjoying all the esteem of a holy patriarch.

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.* Sixpenny Edition, 1863, pp. 1-8.

"I am, dear Sir, with high regard and esteem, your sincere friend and humble servant,

"DAVID LLOYD."[1]

Remembering the position which Fletcher had occupied, during the last six years, as the valiant and greatly abused expounder and defender of Wesley's Anti-Calvinian doctrines, and also bearing in mind the heavenly-mindedness in which Fletcher was now living, and, apparently, dying, there is no room to wonder at Mr. Lloyd's account, or to doubt of its being strictly accurate. Who can adequately conceive the influence of Fletcher's visit on the piety and usefulness of Wesley's conclave of Itinerant Preachers? This is one of the secrets to be revealed hereafter.

Another incident, belonging to this period, must be introduced. James Rogers was now a young Itinerant of five years' standing, but already possessed the confidence and esteem of Wesley, and afterwards had the honour of seeing Wesley die. No doubt, all of Wesley's Preachers, at this time assembled in Bristol, would have been delighted to be introduced to poor Fletcher at Brislington; but, on account of his state of health, this was a privilege not many were permitted to enjoy. James Rogers was one of the favoured few, and he shall be allowed, in his own artless way, to tell the story of his interview, and of an open-air sacramental service. During the previous year, he had been stationed in Edinburgh; now he was appointed to Cornwall. He writes:—

---

[1] "Life of Adam Clarke, LL.D.," by Rev. Samuel Dunn, p. 127.

"In the year 1777, I was appointed to labour in the east of Cornwall. A journey of between four and five hundred miles was no small fatigue, in my then weak state of body; but the Lord was with me. I took my appointment as from God, and set out in His name, and found sweet communion with Him in the way.

"I had long desired to see that most eminently pious man of God, Mr. Fletcher; and now an opportunity offered. Stopping at Bristol a few days, to rest myself and horse, I heard of his being at Mr. Ireland's, about three miles off, and, with two of my brethren, took a ride to see him. When we came there, he was returning from a ride, which he was advised by his physician to take every day. Dismounting from his horse, he came to us with arms spread open, and eyes lifted up to heaven. His apostolic appearance, with the whole of his deportment, greatly affected me. The first words he spoke, while yet standing in the stable by his horse, were a part of the sixteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. He pointed out from thence the descent of the Holy Ghost, as the great promise of the Father, and the privilege of all New Testament believers, in a manner I had never heard before. My soul was dissolved into tenderness, and became as melting wax before the fire.

"As an invidious report had been spread, that he had renounced what he had lately written against Calvinism, I took the liberty to mention the report, and asked him what he thought had given rise to it? He replied, he could not tell, except that he had refrained from speaking on controverted points since he came to Mr. Ireland's: partly, by reason of the poor state of his health; and partly, because he did not wish to grieve his kind friend, by making his house a field of controversy; but he assured us, he had not seen cause to repent of what he had written in defence of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Minutes.' And, though he believed his close application to study had been the means of reducing his body to the state in which we then saw it, yet, he said, if he fell a victim, it was in a good cause.

"After a little conversation upon his darling topic, the *universal love of God in Christ Jesus*, we were about to take our leave, when Mr. Ireland sent his footman into the yard with a bottle of red wine, and some slices of bread upon a waiter. We all uncovered our heads, while Mr. Fletcher craved a blessing upon the same; which he had no sooner done, than he handed first the bread to each, and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, pronounced these words, 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.' Afterwards, handing the wine, he repeated in like manner, 'The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,' etc. Such a sacrament I never had before. A sense of the Divine presence rested upon us all; and we were melted into floods of tears. His worthy friend, Mr. Ireland, grieved to see him exhaust his little strength by so much speaking, took him by the arm, and almost forced him into the house; while he kept looking wistfully, and speaking to us, as long as we could see him. We then mounted our horses, and rode away. That hour more than repaid me for my whole journey from Edinburgh to Cornwall."[1]

The scene so simply described is worthy of being painted by an artistic Methodist.

About the same time, Fletcher wrote as follows to the venerable Vicar of Shoreham, the Rev. Vincent Perronet.

"1777, September 6. My very dear father,—I humbly thank you for the honour and consolation of your two kind letters. Your vouchsafing to remember a poor, unprofitable worm, is to me a sure token that my heavenly Father remembers me. He is God, and therefore I am not consumed. He is a *merciful*, *all-gracious God*, and therefore I am blessed with sympathizing friends and gracious helpers on all sides. O Sir! if in this disordered, imperfect state of the Church, I meet with so much kindness, what shall I not meet with, when the millennium you pray for shall begin? O that the happy thought, the glorious hope may animate me to perfect holiness in the fear of God; that I may be accounted worthy to escape the terrible judgments, which will make way for that happy state of things, and that I may have a part in the first resurrection, if I am numbered among the dead before that happy period begin!

"'Oh! for a firm and lasting faith,
To credit all the Almighty saith!
To embrace the promise of His Son,
And call that glorious rest our own!'

"We are saved by hope at this time; but hope that is seen is not hope. Let us abound, then, in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost: so shall we antedate the millennium, take the kingdom, and enjoy beforehand the rest, which remains for the people of God.

"One of my parishioners brought a horse, last week, to carry me home; and desired to walk by my side all the way. By the advice of your dear son, Mr. William Perronet, who still continues to bestow upon me all the help I could expect from the most loving brother, I sent the man back. I thank God, I am a little stronger than when I came here. I kiss the rod, lean on the staff, and wait the end. I yesterday saw a physician, who told me my case is not yet an absolutely lost case. But the prospect of languishing two or three years longer, a burden to everybody, a help to none, would be very painful, if the will of God and the covenant of life in Christ Jesus did not sanctify all circumstances, and dispel every gloom. I remember, with grateful joy, the happy days I spent at Shoreham: *Tecum vivere amem; tecum obeam lubens.* But, what is better still, I shall live with the Lord and with you for ever and ever.

---

[1] "Experience and Labours of James Rogers," written by himself, 1796, p. 22.

"Your obliged servant and affectionate son,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The next letter has not before been published. It was addressed to the lady who afterwards became his wife:—

"BRISTOL, *October* 20, 1777.

"DEAR MADAM,—The hope of thanking you in person for the favour of your friendly directions, as well as bodily weakness, has prevented me sending you a letter full of grateful acknowledgments. But, as Providence may postpone your intended journey to Bath, and hasten mine into Spain, or into eternity, I trouble you with these lines to testify how indebted I am to you for thinking of admitting me into the number of your patients. I have not tried your remedy yet, because the gentlemen of the faculty, who have attended me here, say, that, though it might be very good for persons of a cold, phlegmatic habit of body, it is improper for those who are, like myself, of a dry, bilious habit. I have taken the bark and rhubarb for some days, and I thought yesterday that the former medicine had removed the spitting of blood; but to-night it has again made its appearance. However, I think I can speak a little better, though I cannot bear the motion of a horse so well as I could two months ago.

"All is well that comes from our heavenly Friend and Physician. Shall we receive the sweet at His hands, and not the bitter? Is not His every dispensation of providence and grace to be received with thankfulness? I would not get well against His will for all the world, and for what I esteem more than all the world,—the pleasure of seeing those whom He has chosen out of the world. If Providence parts us on earth, we shall meet in heaven.

"I have had it, however, in my thoughts to antedate that pleasure with respect to you and your devoted family:[2] I was once going to take the pen to ask your leave to enter and die under your friendly roof; but the fear of troubling you and taking a step contrary to the leadings of Providence, made me decline. If you have not a poor Lazarus at your door to trouble you, you have Lazarus's Friend in your sight and heart, to comfort and save you. May He, every day, appear more glorious in your sight, and may you, every hour, drink deeper into His Spirit!

"My Christian love waits upon Mrs. Crosby, Miss Hurrel, and Miss Ritchie.[3] I hope the Lord binds you each day closer to Himself and to each other, and enables you to see and experience the glory of the promise made to the daughters and handmaids, as well as to the sons and servants of the Lord. Oh, what a day when we shall all be so filled with power from on high, as to go forth and prophesy, and water the Lord's drooping plants and barren parched garden with *rivers of living water flowing from our own souls;* and when an ardent fire of Divine love will make us put our candle to the chaff of sin, and fire all the harvests and tents of the Laodiceans! As Abraham saw the day of *Christ*, our *first Comforter*, and was glad, so I see the day of the *Spirit*, our *other Comforter*, and rejoice. May you live to enjoy it! May you and yours hasten it by the pleadings of mighty prayer! To thank the *Father* for the unspeakable gift of His Son; and to look to both for the fulness of that other *gift of God*, for that *well of living water* which Christ offered to the woman of Samaria, is a blessed work, in which I beg you would assist your obliged brother,

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Miss Bosanquet kept an orphanage, wholly at her own expense.

[3] Three grand old Methodists, and, at least, one of them a preacheress.

"J. FLETCHER.

"Miss Bosanquet,
"At Cross Hall,
"Near *Leads*,
"Yorkshire, by Manchester."
Bristol postmark.

In another letter to Miss Bosanquet, written about the same time, he remarked :—

"I calmly wait, in unshaken resignation, for the full salvation of God: ready to trust Him, to venture on His faithful love and on the sure mercies of David, either at midnight, noonday, or cock-crowing: for my time is in His hand, and His time is best, and shall be my time. Death has lost his sting; and I know not what hurry of spirits is, or what are unbelieving fears, under the most trying circumstances. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."[1]

At the same period, Fletcher commenced a correspondence with another distinguished lady, the Right Hon. Lady Mary Fitzgerald, daughter of the Earl of Bristol, and aunt of Lord Liverpool. She had been married to George Fitzgerald, Esq., and, for about twelve years past, had been an exemplary member of the Methodist Society. The friendship between her and Wesley was great, and Wesley visited her only nine days before his death. In 1815, at the age of ninety, her clothing caught fire, and she died, her last words being, "Come, Lord Jesus, my blessed Redeemer, come and receive my spirit!" In conformity with a clause in her will, her remains were interred in the burial ground at the front of City Road Chapel; and, in memory of her, there is a plain white marble tablet in that sacred edifice.[1] The following is an extract from Fletcher's letter to this Methodist lady:—

---

[1] Mrs. Fletcher's "Letter to Mons. H. L. De la Flechere," 1786, p. 35.

"*October* 21, 1777.

"HONOURED AND DEAR MADAM,—The honour of your Christian letter humbles me; and the idea of your taking half-a-dozen steps, much more that of your taking a journey, to consult so mean a creature as myself, lays me in the dust. My brothers and sisters invite me once more to breathe my native air, and the physicians recommend to me a journey to the continent. If I go, I shall probably pass through London, and, in that case, I could have the honour of waiting upon you. I say, probably, because I shall have to accompany my friend and a serious family, who intend to spend the winter in the south of France, or in Spain; and I do not yet know whether they design to embark at Dover, or at some port in the west of England.

"You have been afflicted as well as myself. May our maladies yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, complete deadness to the world, and increased faith in the mercy, love, and power of Him, who supports under the greatest trials, and can make our extremity of weakness an opportunity of displaying the greatness of His power!

"I have taken the bark for some days, and it seems to have been blessed to the removal of my spitting of blood. Time will decide whether it be a real removal, or only a suspension of that symptom. Either will prove a blessing, as His will is our health. To live singly to God, the best method is to desire it in *meekness;* to spread the desire in *quietness* before Him who inspires it; to offer Him *now* all we have and are, *as we can;* and to open our mouth of expectation wide, that He may fill it with all His fulness, or that He may *try our patience*, and teach us to know our *total helplessness*. With respect to the weeping frame of repentance, and the joyous one of faith, they are both good alternately; but the latter is the better of the two, because it enables us to do, and suffer, and praise, which honours Christ more. Both are happily mixed. May they be so in you, Madam, and in your unworthy and obliged servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

To another lady, Mrs. Thornton, Fletcher wrote:—

"I spend more time in giving my friends an account of my health, than the matter is worth. You will see by the enclosed, which I beg you to send to the post, when you have shown it to Mr. John and Charles Wesley, how their poor servant does. I am kept in sweet peace, and am looking for the triumphant joy of my Lord, and for the fulness expressed in these words, which sweetly filled the sleepless hours of last night,—

---

[1] Stevenson's "City Road Chapel."
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 256.

"'Drawn—and redeem'd—and seal'd,
I bless the One and Three;
With Father, Son, and Spirit fill'd
To all eternity.'

"With respect to my body, I sleep less, and spit more blood than I did when you were here, nor can I bear the least trot of an easy horse. If this continues many days, instead of thinking to go and see my friends on the continent, I shall turn my steps to my earthly home, to be ready to lay my bones in my churchyard. Two of my parishioners came to convey me safe home, and had persuaded me to go with them in a post-chaise; but I had so bad a night before the day that I was to set out, that I gave it up. I have nothing to look at but Jesus and the grave. May I so look at them, as to live in my Resurrection and my life; and die in all the meekness and holiness of my Lord and my all."[1]

Fletcher having decided to go to the continent, it became necessary to arrange monetary and other matters before he started. To two of his friends at Madeley, Mr. Thomas York and Mr. Daniel Edmunds, he wrote as follows:—

"BRISTOL, *November*, 1777.

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—The debt of gratitude I owe to a dying sister, who once took a long journey to see me, when I was ill in Germany, and whom I just stopped from coming, last winter, to Newington to nurse me,—the unanimous advice of the physicians whom I have consulted,—and the opportunity of travelling with serious friends,—have at last determined me to remove to a warmer climate. As it is very doubtful whether I shall be able to stand the journey; and, if I do, whether I shall be able to come back to England; and, if I come back, whether I shall be able to serve my church, it is right to make what provision I can to have it properly served while I live, and to secure some spiritual assistance to my serious parishioners when I shall die.

"I have attempted to build a house in Madeley Wood, about the centre of my parish, where I should be glad the children might be taught to read and write in the day, and the grown-up people might hear the Word of God in the evening, when they can get an Evangelist to preach it to them; and where the serious people might assemble for social worship when they have no teacher. The expense of that building, and paying for the ground it stands upon, have involved me in some difficulties; especially as my ill health has put on me the additional expense of an assistant.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, pp. 249, 253.

"If I had strength, I would serve my church alone, board as cheaply as I could, and save what I was able to do from the produce of the living to clear the debt, and leave that little token of my love, free from encumbrances, to my parishioners.

"But, as Providence orders things otherwise, I have another object, which is to secure a faithful minister to serve the church while I live. Providence has sent me dear Mr. Greaves, who loves the people, and is loved by them. I should be glad to make him comfortable; and, as all the care of my flock, by my illness, devolves upon him, I would not hesitate for a moment to let him have all the profit of the living, if it were not for the debt contracted about the room. My difficulty lies, then, between what I owe to my fellow-labourer, and what I owe to my parishioners, whom I should be sorry to have burdened with a debt contracted for the room.

"My agreement with Mr. Greaves was to allow him forty guineas a year, out of which I was to deduct twelve for his board; but, as I cannot board him when I go abroad, I design to allow him, during my absence, £50 a-year, together with the use of my house, furniture, garden, and my horse, if he chooses to keep one; reserving the use of a room, and a stall in the stable, to entertain the preachers who help us in their Round: not doubting but that the serious people will gladly find them and their horses proper necessaries.

"But I know so little what my income may be, that I am not sure it will yield Mr. Greaves £50, after paying all the expenses of the living. Now I beg you will consult together, and see whether the Vicar's income, *i.e.*, tithes, etc., etc., will discharge all the expenses of the living, and leave a residue sufficient to pay a stipend of £50. I except the royalty, which I have appropriated to the expense of the Room. If it be, well; if there be any surplus, let it be applied to the Room; if there be anything short, then Mr. Greaves may have the whole, and take his chance in that respect, as it will be only taking the Vicar's chance; for I doubt if sometimes, after necessary charges defrayed, the Vicars have had a clear £50.

"I beg you will let me know how the balance of my account stands, that, some way or other, I may order it to be paid immediately; for, if the balance is against me, I could not leave England comfortably without having settled the payment. A letter will settle this business as well as if twenty friends were at the trouble of taking a journey; and talking is far worse for me than reading or writing.

"Ten thousand pardons, my dear friends, for troubling you with this scrawl about worldly matters. I am quite tired with writing, but I cannot lay by my pen without desiring my best Christian love to all my dear companions in tribulation, and neighbours in Shropshire; especially to Mrs. York, Miss Simpson, Mrs. Harper, Mr. Scott, Winny Edmunds, and all enquiring friends. Thank Molly for her good management, and tell her I recommend her to our common Heavenly Master. If she wants to go to London, or to come to Bristol, I shall give her such a character as will help her to some good place. I heartily thank

Daniel, both as churchwarden and as receiver and house-steward; and I beg Mr. York to pay him a proper salary.

"I am, in the best bonds, your affectionate neighbour, friend, and minister, J. FLETCHER."[1]

A letter on small matters, so far as the reader is concerned; but a letter unveiling Fletcher's heart, and exhibiting his perfect unworldliness. The following, extracted from a letter to Mr. William Wase, reveals other characteristics:—

"BRISTOL, *November*, 1777.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—Go to Mrs. Cound, and tell her, I charge her, in the name of God, to give up the world, to set out with all speed for heaven, and to join the few about her who fear God. If she refuses, call again; call weekly, if not daily, and warn her from me till she is ripe for glory. Tell the brethren at Broseley that I did my body an injury the last time I preached to them on the Green; but, if they took the warning, I do not repine. Give my love to George Crannage; tell him to make haste to Christ, and not to doze away his last days.

"The physician has not yet given me up; but, I bless God, I do not wait for his farewell, to give myself up to my God and Saviour. I write by stealth, as my friends here would have me forbear writing, and even talking; but I will never part with my privilege of writing and shouting, '*Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory*' *over sin, death, and the grave* '*through Jesus Christ.*' To Him be glory for ever and ever! Amen!"[2]

To his congregation in Madeley Church, Fletcher wrote as follows:—

"BRISTOL, *November* 26, 1777.

"To the Brethren who hear the Word of God in the parish church of Madeley.

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—I thank you for the declaration of your affectionate remembrance, which you sent me by John Owen, the messenger of your brotherly love.

"As various reasons prevent my coming to take leave of you in person, permit me to do it by letter. The hope of recovering a little strength, to serve you again in the Gospel, makes me take the advice of the physicians, who say that removing to a drier air and warmer climate may be of great service to my health.

"I am more and more persuaded that I have not declared unto you cunningly devised fables, and that the Gospel I have had the honour of preaching, though feebly, among you, is the power of God to salvation, to every one who believes it.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 34.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 36.

"Want of time does not permit me to give you more than the following directions. Have, every day, lower thoughts of yourselves, higher thoughts of Christ, kinder thoughts of your brethren, and more hopeful thoughts of all around you. Love to assemble in the great congregation; but, above all, love to pray to your Father in secret; consider your Saviour; and listen for your Sanctifier. Wait all day long for His glorious appearing within you; and, when you are together, by suitable prayers, proper hymns, and enlivening exhortations, keep up your earnest expectation of His pardoning and sanctifying love. Let not a drop satisfy you; desire an ocean. Do not eat your morsel by yourselves, like selfish, niggardly people, but be ready to share it with all. Let every one with whom you converse be the better for your conversation. Be burning and shining lights wherever you are. Set the fire of divine love to the hellish stubble of sin. Be valiant for the truth. Be champions for love. Be sons of thunder against sin; and sons of consolation towards humbled sinners. Be faithful to your God, your king, and your masters. Let not the good ways of God be blasphemed through any of you.

"You have need of patience, as well as of faith and power. You must learn to *suffer*, as well as *do* the will of God. Think it not strange to pass through fiery trials. Let your faith be firm in a tempest. Let your hope in Christ be as a sure anchor cast within the veil; and your patient love will soon outride the storm. God is the same merciful and faithful God, '*yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*' Believe in His threefold name. Rejoice in every degree of His great salvation. Triumph in hope of the glory which shall be revealed. Do not forget to be thankful for a cup of water; much less for being out of hell, for the means of grace, the forgiveness of sins, the blood of Jesus, the communion of saints on earth, and the future glorification of saints in heaven. Strongly, heartily believe every Gospel truth, especially the latter part of the Apostles' Creed. Believe it till your faith becomes the substance of the eternal life you hope for; and then, come life, come death, either or both will be welcome to you, as, through grace, I find they are to me.

"If I am no more permitted to minister to you in the land of the living, I rejoice at the thought that I shall, perhaps, be allowed to accompany the angels, who, if you continue in the faith, will be commissioned to carry your souls into Abraham's bosom. If our bodies do not moulder away in the same grave, our spirits shall be sweetly lost in the same sea of divine and brotherly love. I hope to see you again in the flesh; but my sweetest and firmest hope is to meet you where there are no parting seas, no interposing mountains, no sickness, no death, no fear of loving too much, no shame for loving too little.

"I earnestly recommend you to the pastoral care of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, to the brotherly care of one another, and to the ministerial care of my substitute. Should I be spared to come back, let me have the joy of finding you all of one heart and one soul; continuing steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine, in fellowship one with another, and in communion with our sin-pardoning and sin-abhorring God."[1]

Immediately after the date of this pastoral epistle, in company with Mr. Ireland, two of his daughters, and another family, Fletcher left Brislington for the south of France. During a halt at Reading, he wrote the following to the Rev. Vincent Perronet, the venerable vicar of Shoreham :—

"READING, *December* 2, 1777.

"HONOURED AND DEAR SIR,—I acknowledge, though late, the favour of your letter. I have given up the thought of going to my parish, and am now on the road to a warmer climate. The Lord may bless as much the change of air, as He has blessed the last remedy your son prescribed for me—I mean the bark. If I should mend a little, I would begin to have faith in your prophecy. In the meantime, let us have faith in Christ, more faith day by day, till all the sayings of Christ are verified to us and in us. Should I go to Geneva, I shall enquire after the Swiss friends of my dear benefactors at Shoreham, to whose prayers I humbly recommend myself and my dear fellow-travellers, one of whom, my little god-daughter, is but eight weeks old."[2]

At the same time, and on the same sheet, he wrote as follows to Miss Damaris Perronet :—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I snatch a moment upon the road to acknowledge the favour of your letter, and to wish you joy in seeing the Lord is faithful in rewarding as well as punishing. I once met a gentleman, an infidel, abroad, who said, 'Men have no faith : if they believed that by forsaking houses, lands, and friends, they should receive a hundredfold, they would instantly renounce all : for who would not carry all his money to the bank of heaven, to receive a hundredfold interest ?' The Papists have made so bad a use of the doctrine of the rewardableness of works, that we dare neither preach it, nor hold it in a scriptural manner. For my part, I think that if it were properly received, it would make a great alteration in the professing world. *You* dare receive it ; try the mighty use of it ; and when you have fully experienced it, do not keep your light to yourself, but impart it to all within the reach of your tongue and pen. I am glad you see that every reward, bestowed upon a reprieved sinner, has free-grace for its foundation, and the blood of Christ for its mark. May the richest rewards of Divine grace be yours in consequence of the most exalted faithfulness ; and let me beseech you to pray that I may follow you, as you follow Christ, till our reward be full."[3]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 40.

[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[3] *Methodist Magazine*, 1804, p. 520.

Thus did Fletcher leave England, reiterating one of the great truths that he had been explaining and defending during the last six years. On the next day after the date of his letter, he arrived at Stoke Newington. Wesley writes :—

> "Wednesday, *December* 3, 1777. I visited as many of the sick as I could in the north-east part of the town; and spent the evening at Newington, with Mr. Fletcher, almost miraculously recovering from his consumption. On Thursday, December 4, he set out, with Mr. Ireland, for the south of France." [1]

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LONG RETIREMENT.

1778—1781.

WHEN the travellers arrived at Dover, Fletcher wrote as follows to his hospitable friends at Stoke Newington:—

"Ten thousand blessings light upon the heads and hearts of my dear benefactors, Charles and Mary Greenwood! May their quiet retreat at Newington become a Bethel to them! Their poor pensioner travels on, though slowly, towards the grave. His journey to the sea seems to him to have hastened, rather than retarded, his progress to his old mother—Earth. May every Providential blast blow him nearer to the heavenly haven of his Saviour's breast; where he hopes to meet all his benefactors! O, my dear friends, what shall I render? What to Jesus? what to you? May He, who invites the heavy-laden, take upon Him all the burdens of kindness you have heaped on your Lazarus! And may angels, when you die, find me in Abraham's bosom, and bring you into *mine*, that by all the kindness which may be shown in heaven, I may try to requite that you have shown to your obliged brother,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Leaving Calais on December 12, 1777, the travellers pursued their way to the South of France. Mr. Ireland thus described the journey:—

"When we departed from Calais, the north wind was very high, and penetrated us even in the chaise. We put up at Bretuil, and the next day got to Abbeville, whence we were forced, by the miserable accommodation we met with, to set out, though it was Sunday. Hitherto Mr. Fletcher and I had led the way, but now the other chaises got before us. Nine miles from Abbeville our axletree gave way through the hard frost, and we were left to the piercing cold on the side of a hill, without shelter. After waiting an hour and a half, we sent the axletree and wheels back to be repaired; and, leaving the body of the chaise under a guard, procured another to carry us to the next town. On the 15th, our chaise arrived in good repair. The country was covered with snow, but travelling steadily forward, we reached Dijon on the 27th. During the whole journey, Mr. Fletcher showed marks of recovery. He bore both the fatigue and cold as well as the best of us. On the 31st, we put up at Lyons, and solemnly closed the year, bowing our knees before the throne, which indeed we did all together every day. January 4, 1778, we left Lyons, and came on the 9th to Aix. Here we rest, the weather being exceedingly fine and warm. Mr. Fletcher walks out daily. He is now able to read and pray with us every morning and evening. He has no remains of his cough nor of the weakness in his breast. His natural colour is restored, and the sallowness quite gone. His appetite is good, and he takes a little wine."

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 249.

In another letter Mr. Ireland wrote :—

"Soon after our arrival here, I rode out most days with my dear and valued friend. Now and then he complained of the uneasiness of the horse, and there were some remains of soreness in his breast; but this soon went off. The beginning of February was warm, and the warmth, when he walked in the fields, relaxed him; but when the wind got north or east, he was braced again. His appetite is good; his complexion as healthy as it was eleven years ago. As his strength increases, he increases the length of his rides. Last Tuesday, he set out on a journey of a hundred and twelve miles. The first day he travelled forty miles without feeling any fatigue; and the third day fifty-five. He bore the journey as well as I did; and was as well and as active at the end of it as at the beginning. During the day, he cried out, 'Help me to praise the Lord for His goodness; I never expected to see this day.' He accepted a pressing invitation to preach to the Protestants here; and he fulfilled his engagement on Sunday morning, taking as his text, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.' Both the French and English were greatly affected; the word went to the hearts of both saints and sinners. His voice is now as good as ever it was; and he has an earnest invitation to preach near Montpelier, where we are going. You would be astonished at the entreaties of pastors as well as people. He has received a letter from a minister in the Levine Mountains, who intends to come to Montpelier, sixty miles, to press him to go and preach to his flock. He purposes to spend the next summer in his own country, and the following winter in these parts."[1]

It was probably at this time that Fletcher and Mr. Ireland made a tour through Italy, and visited Rome, concerning which visit Wesley writes :—

"While he was at Rome, as Mr. Ireland and he were one day going through the streets in a coach, they were informed the Pope was coming, and it would be required of them to kneel while he went by, as all the people did; if they did not, in all probability the mob would knock them on the head. But this they flatly refused to do; judging the paying such honour to a man was idolatry. The coachman was terrified, but turned aside into a narrow way. The Pope was in an open landau, waved his hands, and frequently repeated, 'God bless you all!' Mr. Fletcher's spirit was greatly stirred, and he longed to bear a public testimony against anti-Christ; and he would have done it had he been able to speak Italian. He could hardly refrain from doing it in Latin, till he considered that only the priests could understand him."[1]

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

While in the south of France, Fletcher wrote to Miss Bosanquet the following letter, which is now for the first time published :—

"MARSEILLES, *March* 7, 1778.

"DEAR MADAM,—Your letter did not reach me till after it had lain here, at the post office, several days.

"I cannot be answerable for what the person you mention thinks of Mr. Wesley or me, or our sentiments. Nothing is more common than to see people drawing rash inferences from premises which are partly false and partly true. I can only answer for myself, and for what I deem to be the truth.

"If you ask me what I think to be the truth with respect to Christian perfection, I reply, my sentiments are exposed to the world in my essay on 'Christian Perfection,' and in my essay on 'Truth,' where I lay the stress of the doctrine on the great *promise of the Father*, and on the *Christian fulness of the Spirit.* This I have done more particularly in a treatise on the 'Birth of the Spirit;' which treatise is not yet published. I do not rest the doctrine of Christian perfection on the *absence of sin*,—that is the perfection of a dove or a lamb; nor on the *loving God with all one's power*, for I believe all perfect Gentiles and Jews have done so; but on the *fulness* of that superior, nobler, warmer, and *more powerful* love, which the Apostle calls the *love of the Spirit*, or *the love of God shed abroad by the Holy Ghost*, given to the Christian believers, who, since the Day of Pentecost, go on to the perfection of the Christian dispensation.

"You will find my views of this matter in Mr. Wesley's sermons on Christian Perfection and on Spiritual Christianity; with this difference, that I would distinguish more exactly between the believers baptized with the Pentecostal power of the Holy Ghost, and the believer who, like the Apostles after our Lord's ascension, is not yet filled with that power.

"I own to you, Madam, that I have been much surprised to see the gross inattention to, and unbelief of, the promise of the Father among believers of various classes. It is the sun among the stars, and yet some can hardly distinguish it. When I preached it to the Calvinists in Wales, they called it Mr. Wesley's *whim*. When I have spoken of it to our brethren, some have called it Lady Huntingdon's *whim;* and others have looked upon it as a *new thing;* which to me is the strongest proof that this capital Gospel doctrine is as much under a cloud now as the doctrine of justification by faith was at the time of the Reformation.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

"Should you go back by way of London, my essay on the Birth by which we enter into the Kingdom in the Holy Ghost is in the hands of Miss Thornton, Mrs. Greenwood's sister, who will give it you if you think worth while to look into it. I build my faith not on my experience, though this increases it, but upon the revealed truth of God. Go, Madam, and do the same, and pray for your affectionate brother and servant,

"J. FLETCHER.

"Miss Bosanquet,
"at Mrs. Southcot's,
"Broad Mead,
"Bristol."

The "treatise," or rather sermon, referred to in this letter, was written in French, and was not published during the lifetime of Fletcher; but in 1794, Henry Moore, one of Wesley's first biographers, translated and printed it, with the title, "The New Birth. A Discourse written in French, by the Rev. John Fletcher, late Vicar of Madeley, Salop." 8vo, 39 pp. This was one of the most remarkable productions of Fletcher's pen; and great would be the service rendered to the cause of Christ if, in this day of loose thinking and carnal living, it were reprinted in a separate form, and read by the myriads who call themselves Methodists. Though mere quotations from it cannot do justice to it, yet two or three may be acceptable.

Regeneration.—"What is the state of a soul that is born again; and in what does regeneration consist? In general, we may say, it is that great change by which man passes from a state of nature to a state of grace. He was an animal man; in being born again he becomes a spiritual man. His natural birth had made him like to fallen Adam—to the old man, against whom God had pronounced the sentence of death, seeing it is the wages of sin; but his spiritual birth makes him like to Jesus Christ—to the new man—which is created according to God in righteousness and true holiness. He was before born a child of wrath—proud, sensual, and unbelieving, full of the love of the world and of self-love, a lover of money and of earthly glory and pleasure, rather than a lover of God; but, by regeneration, he is become a child and an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. The humility, the purity, the love of Jesus, is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit which is given to him, making him bear the image of the *Second Adam*. He is in Christ a new creature; old things are passed away, all things are become new. All the powers and faculties of his soul are renovated. His understanding, heretofore covered with darkness, is illuminated by the experimental knowledge which he has of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. His conscience, asleep and insensible, awakes and speaks with a fidelity irreproachable. His hard heart is softened and broken. His will, stubborn and perverse, yields, and becomes conformable to the will of God. His passions, unruly, and earthly, and sensual, submit to the conduct of grace, and turn of themselves to objects invisible and heavenly. And the members of his body, servants more or less to iniquity, are now employed in the service of righteousness unto holiness.''

Why regeneration is necessary.—"To rejoice in the pleasures that are at God's right hand, it is needful to have senses and a taste that correspond thereto. The swine trample pearls under their feet. The elevated discourse of a philosopher is insupportable to a stupid mechanic; and an ignorant peasant, introduced into a circle of men of learning and taste, is disgusted, sighs after his village, and declares no hour ever appeared to him so long. It would be the same to a man who is not regenerated, if we could suppose that God would so far forget His truth as to open to him the gate of heaven. He would be incapable of those transports of love which make the happiness of the glorified saints. It would be insupportable for him now to meditate one hour on the perfections of God; what then shall He do among the *cherubim* and *seraphim*, and *the spirits of just men made perfect*, who draw from thence their ravishing delights? He loves the pleasures and comforts of an animal life; but are these the same with the exercises of the spiritual life? His conversations, his readings, his amusements, as void of edification as of usefulness, rarely fatigue him; but an hour of meditation or prayer is insufferable. If he be not born again, not only he cannot be in a state to rejoice in the pleasures of Paradise, any more than a deaf man to receive with transport the most exquisite music; but the ravishing delights of angels would cause in him an insupportable distaste. Yes, he would banish himself from the presence of God, rather than pass an eternity in prostrating himself before the throne, and crying day and night, *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, who is, and who was, and who is to come!* We conclude that the gate of heaven must be opened upon earth by regeneration, and by the love of God, or that it will remain shut for ever; and that a local paradise would be only a sorrowful prison, to a man not regenerated, because, carrying nothing thither but depraved and earthly appetites and passions, and finding nothing there but spiritual and celestial objects, disgust and dissatisfaction would be the consequence; and, like Satan, his own mind would be his hell.''

Perorations are too often rhetorical flourishes, and nothing more; but, in the case of Fletcher, they were the outpourings of a heart overcharged with feeling. The following is the last paragraph in the remarkable "Treatise" from which the foregoing extracts are taken:—

"I conjure you by the majesty of that God before whom angels rejoice with trembling;—by the terror of the Lord, who may speak to you in thunder, and this instant require your soul of you;—by the tender mercies, the bowels of compassion of your heavenly Father, which are moved in your favour, all ungrateful as you are!—I conjure you by the incarnation of the Eternal Word, by whom you were created;—by the humiliation, the pains, the temptations, the tears, the bloody sweat, the agony, the cries of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ!—I conjure you by the bonds, the insults, the scourgings, the robes of derision, the crown of thorns, the ponderous cross, the nails, the instruments of death which pierced His torn body; by the arrows of the Almighty, the poison of which drank up His spirit; by that mysterious stroke of Divine wrath, and by those unknown terrors which forced Him to exclaim, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!'—I conjure you by the interests of your immortal soul, and by the unseen accidents which may precipitate you into eternity;—by the bed of death, upon which you will soon be stretched, and by the useless sighs which you will then pour out, if your peace be not made with God!—I conjure you by the sword of Divine justice, and by the sceptre of grace;—by the sound of the last trumpet, and by the sudden appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, with ten thousand of His holy angels;—by that august tribunal, at which you will appear with me, and which shall decide our lot for ever;—by the vain despair of hardened sinners, and by the unknown transports of regenerate souls!—I conjure you from this instant work out your salvation with fear and trembling! Enter by the door into the sheepfold. Sell all to purchase the pearl of great price. Count all things dung and dross in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Let Him not go till He blesses you with that faith which justifies, and that sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord. And, soon transported from this vale of tears into the mansions of the just made perfect, you shall cast your crown of immortal glory at the feet of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and before the Lamb who has redeemed us by His blood: to whom be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the power for ever and ever! Amen."

It is time to return to Fletcher in the south of France. At the close of his sojourn here, he wrote as follows to his curate, Mr. Greaves:—

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—I received a letter yesterday from my second brother, who acquaints me, that he was to set out the 23rd of last month, to come hither" (Montpelier), "and take me to my native country, where my sick sister wants greatly to see me; so that, if it please God, I shall, next week, leave this place. The winter has been uncommonly rainy and windy; and even last week we had half an inch of snow. The climate has, nevertheless, agreed with me better than England, and, as a proof of it, I need only tell you, that I rode last Friday, from Hieres, the orange gardens of France, hither, which is nearly fifty miles, and was well enough to preach last Sunday in French at the Protestant Church. Two English clergymen came to hear me, and one of them takes these lines to England, where I hope they will find you in health of body and soul, growing in strength of faith, in firmness of hope, and in fervency of love to God and man, and especially to those whom you are tempted to think hardly of, if any such there be. O my dear brother, no religion will do us or our people any good, but that which 'works by love,'—humble, childlike, obedient love. May that religion fill our souls, and influence all our tempers, words, and actions, and may the leaven leaven the whole lump! May St. James's peaceable religion spread through all our parish!

"I hope you are settled to your satisfaction; and I shall be glad to do what is in my power to make your stay at Madeley agreeable. I wish you may have as much success as we desire; but, whatever success we have, we must cast our bread upon the waters, though we should see as little fruit as he that said of old, 'I have laboured in vain:' for our reward will be with the Lord, if not with men."[1]

In company with his brother, Fletcher left Montpelier, and arrived at Nyon, the place of his nativity, where, in the house once occupied by his father, he received the utmost attention from his affectionate relatives, and had medical advice equal to any to be obtained in Europe. One of his first acts was to write "to the Societies in and about Madeley." He addressed them as "My dear, very dear brethren;" charged them all to meet him in heaven, "with all the mind that was in Christ;" and sent his "love and thanks to Mr. Murlin and Mr. Roberts," the two Methodist preachers stationed at Chester, showing that Madeley, at this period, was a part of the Chester circuit.[2]

Soon afterwards, he wrote to his beloved medical adviser, in England, Mr. William Perronet, as follows:—

"NYON, *May* 15, 1778.

"The climate, and prospect, and fine roads, and pure air I enjoy here, had contributed to strengthen me a little; when, about a month ago, something I was chewing got into my windpipe, and caused a fit of coughing which lasted half-an-hour. I then began to spit blood again, and ever since I have had a bad cough, which has sometimes exercised me violently for an hour after my first sleep. My cough, however, has been better the last two days, and I hope it will go off. I have bought a quiet horse, whose easy pace I can bear; and I ride much. I have not ventured upon preaching since I came hither: it would be impossible for me now to go through it. If the weather should grow hot, I may, at any time, go to the hills, the foot of which is five or six miles distant. I drink goats' milk, and have left off meat since the cough came on, but design eating a little again at dinner."[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 43.

Two days after the date of this letter, Fletcher was at Macon, whither he had gone to meet his friend Mr. Ireland, on his return from Montpelier to England. Whilst he was here, he wrote two letters, which must be quoted. The first, addressed to "The Rev. Messrs. John and Charles Wesley," was as follows:—

"MACON, IN BURGUNDY, *May* 17, 1778.

"REV. AND DEAR SIRS,—I hope while I lie by, the Lord continues to renew your vigour, and sends you to water His vineyard, and to stand in the gap against error and vice.

"I preached twice at Marseilles, but was not permitted to follow the blow. There are few noble, inquisitive Bereans in these parts. The ministers in the town of my nativity have been very civil. They have offered me the pulpit; but, I fear, if I could accept the offer, it would soon be recalled. I am loath to quit this part of the field without casting a stone at that giant, sin, who stalks about with uncommon boldness. I shall, therefore, stay some months longer, to see if the Lord will give me strength to venture an attack.

"Gambling and dress, sinful pleasure and love of money, unbelief and false philosophy, lightness of spirit, fear of man, and love of the world, are the principal sins by which Satan binds his captives in these parts. Materialism is not rare; Deism and Socinianism are very common; and a set of Free-thinkers, great admirers of Voltaire[2] and Rosseau, Bayle and Mirabeau, seem bent upon destroying Christianity and government. If we believe them, the world is the dupe of kings and priests. Religion is fanaticism and superstition. Subordination is slavery. Christian morality is absurd, unnatural, and impracticable; and Christianity the most bloody religion that ever was. And here it is certain, that, by the example of Christians *so called*, and by our continual disputes, they have a great advantage, and do the truth immense mischief. *Popery will certainly fall in France, in this or the next*

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[2] Thirteen days after the date of this letter, Voltaire, in Paris, took a large dose of opium, without the advice of his physicians, and died.

century; and I have no doubt God will use those vain men to bring about a reformation here, as he used Henry the Eighth to do that work in England; so the madness of His enemies shall, at last, turn to His praise, and to the futherance of His kingdom.

"In the meantime, it becomes all lovers of the truth to make their heavenly tempers, and humble, peaceful love to shine before all men, that those mighty adversaries, seeing the good works of professors, may glorify their Father who is in heaven, and no more blaspheme that worthy name, by which we are all called Christians.

"If you ask, what system these men adopt? I answer, some build on Deism a morality founded on *self-preservation*, *self-interest*, and *self-honour*. Others laugh at all morality, except that which being neglected *violently* disturbs society. And external order is the decen covering of Fatalism, while Materialism is their system.

"Oh, dear Sirs, let me entreat you, in these dangerous days, to use your wide influence, with unabated zeal, against the scheme of these modern Celsuses, Porphyries, and Julians, by calling all professors to think and speak the same things, to love and embrace one another, and to firmly resist those daring men; many of whom are already in England, headed by the admirers of Mr. Hume and Mr. Hobbes. But it is needless to say this to those who have made, and continue to make, such a stand for vital Christianity; so that I have nothing to do but pray that the Lord may abundantly support and strengthen you, and make you a continued comfort to His enlightened people, loving reprovers of those who mix light with darkness, and a terror to the perverse.

"I need not tell you, Sirs, that the hour in which Providence shall make my way plain to return to England, to unite with those who feel or seek the power of Christian godliness, will be welcome to me. O favoured Britons! Happy would it be for them, if they knew their Gospel privileges!

"My relations in Adam are all very kind to me; but the spiritual relations, whom God has raised me in England, exceed them yet. Thanks be to Christ, and to His blasphemed religion!

"I am, Rev. Sirs, your affectionate son, and obliged servant in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

On the day after the date of this letter, Fletcher wrote the following to the Rev. Dr. Conyers, another Methodist Clergyman, to whom he had sent his "*Reconciliation; or, an easy Method to unite the people of God,*" published in 1777:—

"MACON, IN BURGUNDY, *May* 18, 1778.

"HON. AND DEAR SIR,—I left orders, with a friend, to send you a little book called '*The Reconciliation,*' in which I endeavour to bring nearer the children of God, who are divided about their *partial* views of divine truths. I know not whether that tract has, in any degree, answered its design; but I believe truth can be reconciled with itself, and the candid children of God one with another. O that some *abler* hand, and *more loving* heart, would undertake to mend my plan, or draw one more agreeable to the Word of God! My eyes are upon *you*, dear Sir, and those who are like-minded with you, for this work. Disappoint not my hope. Stand forth, and make way for reconciling love, by removing, so far as lies in you, what is in the way of brotherly union.

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1788, p. 384.

"O Sir! the work is worthy of you. If you saw with what boldness the false philosophers of the continent, who are the apostles of the age, attack Christianity, and represent it as one of the worst religions in the world, and fit only to make the professors of it murder one another, or at least to contend among themselves, and how they urge our disputes to make the Gospel of Christ the jest of nations, and the abhorrence of all flesh, you would break through your natural timidity, and invite all our brethren in the ministry to unite and form a close battalion, and face the common enemy.

"O dear Sir! take courage. Be bold for reconciling truth. Be bold for peace. You can do all things through Christ strengthening you; and, as *Doctor Conyers*, you can do many things, a great many more than you think. What if you go, Sir, in Christ's name, to all the Gospel ministers of your acquaintance, exhort them as a father, entreat them as a brother, and bring them, or as many of them as you can, together? Think you that your labour would be in vain in the Lord? Impossible, Sir! O despair not. If you want a coach, or a friend to accompany you, when you go upon this errand of love, remember there is a *Thornton* in London, and an *Ireland* in Bristol, who will wish you God speed; and God will raise many more to concur in the peaceful work.

"Let me humbly entreat you to go to work, and to persevere in it. I wish I had strength to be, at least, your postilion when you go. I would drive, if not like Jehu, at least with some degree of cheerful swiftness, while Christ smiled on the Christian attempt. But I am confident you can do all in the absence of him, who is, with brotherly love, and dutiful respect, Hon. and dear Sir, your obedient servant in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Dr. Conyers, to whom this letter was addressed, was a notable man. Born at Helmsley, Yorkshire, in 1725, he, in due time, became the Vicar of that extensive parish. His conversion there, and his labours, were remarkable. In 1765, he married Mrs. Knipe, a rich and pious widow, the sister of the well-known John Thornton, Esq., of Clapham. Three years before the foregoing letter was written, Mr. Thornton presented him to the living of St. Paul's, Deptford; and here he died in 1786, eight months after the death of Fletcher.[1] At the beginning of his evangelical career, he was warmly attached to Wesley, and a firm believer in the doctrines of the Arminians. Afterwards, he was, to some extent, influenced by certain of the Calvinian Ministers, with whom he held converse; but, like his brother-in-law, John Thornton, he was a lover of all good men; and, occupying a kind of neutral position between the contending parties, Fletcher deemed him well qualified to bring about the reconciliation of the two.

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1788, p. 386.

At this period, the venerable Vicar of Shoreham had been recently informed that he was entitled to a valuable estate in Switzerland, and William Perronet, Fletcher's medical adviser in England, had undertaken to visit Switzerland to enforce his father's rights. Before doing so, however, he wrote to Fletcher, requesting his advice; and Fletcher's reply was as follows:—

"NYON, *June* 2, 1778.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—When I wrote to you last, I mentioned two ladies of your family who have married two brothers, Messrs. Monod. Since then, they have requested me to send your father the enclosed memorial, which I hope will prove of use to your family. As the bad writing and the language may make the understanding of it difficult, I forward you the substance of it, and of the letter of the ladies' lawyer.

"While I invite you to make your title clear to a precarious estate on earth, permit me, my dear Sir, to remind you of the heavenly inheritance entailed on believers. The will, the New Testament by which we can recover it, is proved. The Court is just and equitable; the Judge is gracious and loving. To enter into possession of a part of the estate here, and of the whole hereafter, we need only believe and prove *evangelically* that we are believers. Let us then set about it *now*, with earnestness, with perseverance, and with a full assurance that, through grace, we shall carry our cause. Alas! what are estates and crowns to grace and glory?

"I have had a pull back since I wrote last. After I left Mr. Ireland at Macon, to shorten my journey and enjoy new prospects, I ventured to cross the mountains which separate France from this country. On the third day of the journey, I found a large hill, whose winding roads were so steep that, though we fed the horses with bread and wine, they could scarcely draw the chaise, and I was obliged to walk in all the steepest places. The climbing lasted several hours; the sun was hot; I perspired violently; and the next day I spit blood again. I have chiefly kept to goat's milk ever since; I find myself better; and my cough is neither frequent nor violent.

---

[1] *Evangelical Magazine*, 1794.

"This is a delightful country. If you come to see it, and to claim the estate, bring all the papers and memorials you can collect; and share a pleasant apartment, and one of the finest prospects in the world, in the house where I was born. I design to try this fine air some months longer. We have a fine shady wood near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all the day, and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds. But this, though sweet, does not come up to the singing of my dear friends in England. There I meet them in spirit several hours in the day."[1]

The ensuing letter, kindly lent by the Rev. Dr. Knowles, of Tunbridge Wells, has not before been published. It was addressed to "Mr. Power, Druggist, in Broadmead, Bristol, Angleterre."

"NYON, *June* 20, 1778.

"DEAR SIR,—A journey and my constant rides have hindered me acknowledging sooner the favour of your observations and criticisms, which I received some time ago. If I had my little publications here, to turn to the pages you quote, I would immediately make notes, and alter or rectify what you object to, as a preparation for a more correct edition, should the work be ever reprinted. I wish all my friends had taken as much pains about my works as you have, Sir; they would by this time be more correct. Accept my sincere thanks for the favour; and, if I live to see England again, we shall (please God) talk the matter over fully.

"I am obliged to you for your caution about preaching. I have followed it, and have not yet preached in this country, though I believe I shall soon venture again upon it, but with care and in a sparing manner. I hope at least the Lord will give me grace so to do.

"I heartily rejoice that Mrs. Power has been carried safely, a second time, through the danger of child-bearing. May she and the two fruits of her body live to the glory of God, and to your comfort! Remember me kindly to her; and give my blessing to my god-son, whose will, I hope, you continue to break with the wisdom, patience, and steadiness which become a parent.

"I sent your mother a few lines by Mr. Ireland. I hope she received them; but I shall never get an answer, if what he writes me is true. Is she dead indeed? Sometimes I hope it is a rumour without foundation; and yet his account that she died at Bath, where your letter mentions she was gone, makes me fear he was well-informed. If she is no more, you have lost a tender mother, and I a kind friend; but the Lord will make up all our losses, and has already made them up by giving us His Son. May we receive Him, and with Him all that is excellent among the living and the dead! As she has been for many years a woman of sorrow,—a true Hannah—wading almost constantly through a sea of temptations, they may have followed her to the last, and she may have escaped out of many tribulations, as the saints mentioned in the Revelation. A line about it, and about your welfare, and that of my god-son, will greatly oblige, dear Sir, your obedient and already obliged servant, J. FLETCHER.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 263, and Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"My love to your brother, when you see him."

The next letter, written to Mr. Ireland, contains a sylvan scene worthy of being painted:—

"NYON, *July* 15, 1778.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have ventured to preach once, and to expound once in the church. Our ministers are very kind, and preach to the purpose. A young one of this town gave us lately a very excellent gospel sermon.

"Grown-up people stand fast in their stupidity, or in their self-righteousness. The day I preached, I met some children in my wood gathering strawberries. I spoke to them about our *common* Father. We felt a touch of brotherly affection. They said they would sing to their Father, as well as the birds; and followed me, attempting to make such melody as you know is commonly made in these parts. I outrode them, but some of them had the patience to follow me home; and said they would speak with me. The people of the house stopped them, saying, I would not be troubled with children. They cried, and said, *they were sure I would not say so, for I was their good brother*. The next day, when I heard this, I enquired after them, and invited them to come and see me; which they have done every day since. I make them little hymns, which they sing. Some of them are under sweet drawings. Yesterday, I wept for joy on hearing one of them speak, as an experienced believer in Bristol would have done, of conviction of sin, and of the joy unspeakable in Christ that followed. Last Sunday, I met them in the wood; there were a hundred of them, and as many adults. Our first pastor has since desired me to desist from preaching in the wood (for I had exhorted), for fear of giving umbrage; and I have complied, from a concurrence of circumstances which are not worth mentioning; I therefore now meet them in my father's yard."[1]

What a contrast to this scene of gentleness among children is the following!

Fletcher had a nephew, who had been in the Sardinian army, where his ungentlemanly and profligate conduct had given such general offence to his brother officers that they determined to compel him to leave their corps, or to fight them all in succession. After engaging in two or three duels, with various success, the young bravo left the service, and now, during Fletcher's present visit, he returned to Switzerland. His resources were soon spent in profligacy; and, gaining access to his uncle, General De Gons, he presented a loaded pistol, and said, "Uncle De Gons, if you do not give me a draft on your banker for five hundred crowns, I will shoot you." The General was a brave man, but, seeing himself in the power of a desperado capable of any mischief, he wrote the draft. "Uncle," said the young fellow, "you must do another thing; you must promise me, on your honour, to use no means to recover the draft, or to bring me to justice." The General promised, and the bandit rode away triumphantly. Passing the door of his uncle Fletcher, he called upon him, and told him General De Gons had generously given him five hundred crowns. Fletcher doubted the truthfulness of this statement. The draft was produced. "Let me see it," said Fletcher. It was handed to him. Fletcher examined it, and remarked, "It is indeed my brother's writing, and it astonishes me; because my brother is not wealthy, and I know that he justly disapproves your conduct, and that you are the last in the family to whom he would make such a present." Then, folding the draft and putting it into his pocket, Fletcher added, "It strikes me, young man, that you have obtained this draft improperly; and, in honesty, I cannot return it without my brother's approbation." Out came the pistol, and was levelled at Fletcher's breast. "Return it," cried the young scoundrel, "or I will take your life." "My life," calmly replied Fletcher, "is secure in the protection of the Almighty Power who guards it; nor will He suffer it to be the forfeit of your rashness, or my integrity. Do you think that I, who have been a minister of God for five-and-twenty years, am afraid of death? It is for you to fear death, who have every reason to fear it. You are a gamester and a cheat, yet call yourself a gentleman! You are the seducer of female innocence, and still you say that you are a gentleman! You are a duellist and your hand is red with blood, and for this you call yourself a man of honour! Look there, Sir! look there! See, the broad eye of heaven is upon us. Tremble in the presence of your Maker, who can in a moment kill your body, and for ever damn your soul!" The culprit turned pale; then he argued, threatened, and entreated. Sometimes, taking out his pistol, he fixed himself against the door to prevent egress; and, at other times, closed on frail Fletcher, menacing him with instantaneous death. All was of no avail. The poor country parson was as valorous as the most heroic soldier. He gave no alarm to the family; he sought no weapon; he attempted no escape; he simply conversed with the calmness of a hero and a saint. At length, the young fellow began to be affected; and now, having gained the victory, Fletcher addressed him in another strain: "I cannot return my brother's draft," said he; "yet I feel for your distress, and will endeavour to relieve it. My brother Gons, at my request, I am sure will give you a hundred crowns; I will do the same; perhaps my brother Henry will do as much; and I hope your own family will make up the five hundred crowns among them." Fletcher then fell upon his knees, and began to pray; uncle and nephew parted, and the family, by Fletcher's mediation, furnished the young scapegrace with the five hundred crowns he had feloniously attempted to extort.[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 264.

Amidst such scenes, Fletcher did not forget his friends at Madeley. On July 18, he wrote three messages:—

To his curate, the Rev. Mr. Greaves.—"I trust you lay yourself out for the good of the flock committed to your care. I shall be glad to hear that they grow in grace, and humble love."

To the congregation in Madeley church.—"John Fletcher begs a farther interest in the prayers of the congregation of Madeley; and desires those, who assemble to serve God in the church, to help him to return public thanks to Almighty God for many mercies received; especially, for being able to do a little ministerial duty. He humbly beseeches them to serve God as Christians, and to love one another as brethren; neglecting no means of grace, and rejoicing in all the hopes of glory."

To the Methodist Societies "in Madeley, Dawley, and the Banks."—'We are all called to grow in grace, and, consequently, in love, which is the greatest of all Christian graces. Your prayers for my soul and my body have not been without answer. Blessed be God! Glory be to His rich mercy in Christ, I live yet *the life of faith;* as to my body, I recover some strength. God bless you all, with all the blessings brought to the Church by Christ Jesus, and by the other Comforter! My love to the preachers" (John Murlin and Robert Roberts), "whom I beg you will thank in my name."[1]

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 129.

Two months later (September 15), he wrote to his friend Thomas York :—

"Blessed be the God of all consolation, though I have still very trying and feverish nights, I am kept in peace of mind; resigned to His will, who afflicts me for my good, and justly sets me aside for my unprofitableness. His grace within, and His people without, turn my trying circumstances into matter of praise. Give my love to all your dear family; to the two or three who may yet remember me at Shiffnal; and, also, to Daniel, and desire him, when he gathers the Easter dues, to give my love and thanks to *all* my parishioners."[2]

No doubt Fletcher's statement to Mr. York, respecting himself, was strictly true; but, still, there must have been a considerable improvement in his health since he left England. Hence the following interesting letter, written to Mr. Ireland only ten days later :—

"NYON, *September* 25, 1778.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am just returned from an excursion I have made with my brother, through the fine vale in the midst of the high hills which divide France from this country. In that vale we found three lakes, one on French ground, and two on Swiss: the largest is six miles long and two wide. It is the part of the country where industry is most apparent, and where population thrives best. The inhabitants are chiefly woodmen, coopers, watchmakers, and jewellers. They told me, they had the best singing, and the best preacher, in the country. I asked, if any sinners were converted under his ministry? They stared, and asked, what I meant by conversion? When I had explained myself, they said, 'We do not live in the time of miracles.'

"I was better satisfied in passing through a part of the vale which belongs to the King of France. I saw a prodigious concourse of people, and supposed they kept a fair, but was agreeably surprised to find three missionaries in the midst of them, who went about as itinerant preachers to help the regular clergy. They had been there some days, and were three brothers, and preached morning and evening. The evening service opened with what they called *a conference.* One of the missionaries took the pulpit, and the parish priest proposed questions to him, which he answered at full length and in a very edifying manner. The subject was the unlawfulness and the mischief of those methods by which persons of different sexes lay snares for each other, and corrupt each other's morals. The subject was treated with delicacy, propriety, and truth. The method was admirably well calculated to draw and fix the attention of a mixed multitude. This *conference* being ended, another missionary took the pulpit. His text was our Lord's description of the day of judgment. Before the sermon, all those who, for the press, could kneel, did, and sang a French hymn to beg a blessing on the word; and indeed it was blessed. An awful attention was visible upon most, and, during a good part of the discourse, the voice of the preacher was almost lost in the cries and bitter wailings of the audience. When the outcry began, the preacher was describing the departure of the wicked into eternal fire. They urged that God was merciful, and that Jesus Christ had shed His blood for them. 'But that mercy you have slighted, and now is the time of justice. That blood you have trodden under foot, and now it cries for vengeance. Know your day. Slight the Father's mercy and the Son's blood no longer.' I have seen but once or twice congregations as much affected in England.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 45.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 45.

"One of our ministers being ill, I ventured, a second time, into the pulpit last Sunday; and, the Sunday before, I preached, six miles off, to two thousand people in the yard of a jail, where they were come to see a murderer before his execution. I was a little abused by the bailiff on the occasion, and was refused the liberty of attending the poor man to the scaffold, where he was to be broken on the wheel. I hope he died penitent. The day before he suffered, he said he had broken his irons, and that, as he deserved to die, he desired new ones to be put on, lest he should be tempted to make his escape.

"You ask, what I design to do? I propose, if it be the Lord's will, to spend the winter here. In the spring, I shall, if nothing prevents, return to England with you, or with Mr. Perronet, if his affairs are settled, or alone, if other ways fail. In the meanwhile, I rejoice with you in Jesus, and in the glorious hope of that complete salvation His faithfulness has promised, and His power can never be at a loss to bestow. We must be saved by faith and hope till we are saved by perfect love, and made partakers of heavenly glory. I am truly a *stranger* here. As strangers let us go where we shall meet the assembly of the righteous gathered in Jesus."[1]

Mr. William Perronet arrived at Nyon in the month of December, and, in letters to his father, related :—

"However engaged Mr. Fletcher is the greater part of the day, he is generally so kind as to spend a little time with me in the evening in prayer and conversation. His chief delight seems to be in meeting his little society of children. He is exceedingly fond of them, and they appear to be as fond of him. He seldom walks abroad or rides out, but some of them follow him, singing the hymns they have learned, and conversing with him by the way. But you must not suppose that he is permitted to enjoy this happiness unmolested. Not only do the drunkards make songs on him and his little companions, but many of the clergy loudly complain of such irregular proceedings. However, he is upon good terms with three ministers of the place; all of whom are serious men, and desirous of promoting true religion.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 268.

"He is better, I think, than when he left England; but he frequently puts his strength to too severe a trial, by meeting his Society of children, and some grown persons; and other exercises of a like nature. When he ventures to preach, his spitting of blood returns; and whenever this happens, his strength and spirits decay surprisingly."[1]

Fletcher and his brother translated all the papers of William Perronet into French, and, in other ways, assisted him, in reference to the estate which he had gone to Switzerland to obtain. Notwithstanding the delicate state of Fletcher's health, the three set out, in the wintry weather of that December month, to visit Chateau d' Oex, where the property was situated. The distance from Nyon was fifty-seven miles. When they had made about a quarter of the journey, "the horses were tired out, the coachman refused to proceed further," and they were obliged to return home again.[2] A few days later, they made another attempt, and arrived at their destination on January 10, 1779. Five days afterwards, they were again at Nyon.

In Fletcher's state of health, such a journey was perilous; but his love to the Perronet family was such that, to him, no labour and risk, on their behalf, were too great. In letters to his venerable father, at Shoreham, William Perronet states, that none of them having been to Chateau d'Oex before, they were obliged to employ a guide, and that "on account of the badness of the ways," they had "to go some leagues about," which made their journey about eighty miles. Their coach had to pass "over mountains of snow and rocks of ice." When nine miles from Chateau d'Oex, they were obliged to exchange their coach for "an open sledge;" and now they "travelled through narrow passes, cut through the snow, which, on both sides, was many feet above their heads; on the sides of mountains, whose summits the eye could scarcely reach; and frequently on the brink of precipices, at the bottoms of which they could hear the waters roar like thunder." In one place, Fletcher and William Perronet, being obliged to walk, their feet slipped: Fletcher "received a violent blow on the back part of the head;" and William Perronet "sprained" his "wrist." In crossing the Alps, they had to lie "two nights in beds that were not only damp, but musty and without curtains;" and, "being in a Popish canton, and Friday and Saturday being meagre days," they "were almost starved with hunger as well as cold." "The weather was extremely severe, and it was scarce in the power of clothes, or even of fire, to keep" them "warm." William Perrônet concludes his narrative of their adventures as follows:—

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher"

[2] *Ibid.*

> "Whether I succeed in my temporal business or not, I shall ever remember, with pleasure and thankfulness, the opportunities I have been blessed with in spending so much time in company with our inestimable friend; who, wherever he goes, preaches the Gospel, both by his words and example; nay, by his very looks, not only to his friends, but to all whom he meets: so that, on the top of the frozen Alps, and in the dreary vale of Chateau d'Oex, good seed has been sown. At Chateau d'Oex, he was visited by some of the principal inhabitants, who stood around him, in deep attention, for almost an hour, while he exhorted and prayed."[1]

In a postscript to this letter, Fletcher wrote:—

> "I have had the pleasure of accompanying your son to your father's birthplace. It is a charming country for those who have a taste for highland prospects; but what is it to our heavenly Father's *Hill of Sion?* Thither may we all travel, summer and winter, and there may we all have a happy meeting, and find an eternal inheritance!"

Three weeks later, Fletcher wrote the following to Mr. Ireland:—

> "NYON, *February* 2, 1779.
>
> "MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sorry to hear that you are still tried by illness; but our good, heavenly Father is wise; His will be done; His name be praised!
>
> "I am better, thank God! and ride out every day, when the slippery

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

roads will permit me to venture without the risk of breaking my horse's legs and my own neck. You will ask me how I spend my time? I pray, have patience, rejoice, and write, when I can; I saw wood in the house when I cannot go out; and eat grapes, of which I have always a basket by me.

"Our little Lord-Lieutenant has forbidden the ministers to let me exhort in the parsonage, because it is the *sovereign's house*. My second brother has addressed a memorial to him, in which he informs him that he will give up neither his religious nor civil liberty, and will open his house for the Word of God. According, we have since met at his house.

"On Sunday, we met at the young clergyman's who writes against the conduct of the clergy; but I fear we fence against a wall of brass. However, I am quite persuaded that Providence calls me to leave a testimony to my French brethren, and it may be of some use when I shall be no more. I have been comforted by the apology of a minister at Yverdon, who was persecuted at the beginning of this century under the name of Pietist; and I have become acquainted with a faithful minister of Geneva, but he dares no more offer me his pulpit than my brother-in-law at Lausanne.

"Several young women seem to have received the Word in the love of it, and four or five grown-up ones; but not one man, except the young hopeful clergyman I mention, who helps me at my little meetings, and begins to preach extempore. The truths I chiefly insist upon, when I talk to the people who will hear me, are those which I feed upon myself as my daily bread. 'God, our Maker and Preserver, though invisible, is *here* and *everywhere*. He is our chief good, because all beauty and all goodness centre in and flow from Him. He is especially *love;* and love in us, being His image, is the sum and substance of all moral and spiritual excellence—of all true and lasting bliss. In Adam we are all estranged from love and from God; but the Second Adam—Jesus, Emanuel, God with us,—is come to make us know and enjoy again our God as the God of love and the chief good. All who receive Jesus receive power to become the sons of God,' etc., etc.

"I hope I shall be able to set out for England with Mr. Perronet, in April or May. O that I may find that dear island in peace within and without![1] Well, I hope you make peace in the Church if you cannot make peace with the patriots.

"The coats and shoes you gave me have lasted *all this while*, and are yet good; so that I need not draw upon your banker. Thank God, and you, for a thousand favours! God bless and comfort you, my dear friend! We are poor creatures, but we have a good God to cast all our burdens upon, and who often burdens us that we may have constant and free recourse to His bounty, power, and faithfulness. Stand fast in the faith. Believe *lovingly*, and all will be well."[2]

---

[1] The war with the American Colonists was now raging, and England was greatly excited.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 271.

To his friend and Methodist helper among the Madeley Societies, William Wase, Fletcher wrote as follows :—

"NYON, *February* 11, 1779.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have just received yours of January 24, and rejoice to hear of the welfare of your friends, whom I long much to see; but there is no blessing *here* without some alloy of grief, and such was to me the account of the poor state of health of dear Mrs. Wase. Tell her I should be glad to hold up her hands in her fight of affliction; but, if the poor, unprofitable, weak servant is afar off, the Master, who is rich in mercy, who fills the whole world with His goodness and patience, is near to her and to all His afflicted ones. I recommend to her two remedies. One is a cheerful resignation to the will of God, whereby her animal spirits will be greatly raised or sweetly refreshed. The other is, four lumps of heavenly sugar, to be taken every half hour, day and night, when she does not sleep. I make a constant use of them, to my great comfort. They have quickened my soul when I was dying, and I doubt not they will have the same effect upon hers. They are: 'God so loved the world,' etc. 'If any man sin,' etc. 'It is a faithful saying,' etc. 'Come unto Me, all ye that are weary,' etc.

"Tell my little god-daughter, Patty Cartwright, she is big enough and bad enough to take these heavenly pills. Tell her mother to take them regularly with her. What a shame it is to have such a remedy and not to make more use of it!

"Remember me in much love to dear Mr. Hatton. Thank brother Costerdine and his fellow-labourer[1] for their occasional help. May the Lord vouchsafe to consecrate our little Zoar[2] by calling one sinner and establishing another saint! How abundantly shall we be repaid for our little expense and trouble! Thank the brethren you have mentioned; salute them kindly from me, not forgetting John Tranter and our friends at the Fore Bank—Thomas Pool and Thomas Banks, and our friends at Dawley Green. You may see in the enclosed that I am not without hopes of telling you in May how much I am yours,

"J. FLETCHER."[3]

"The enclosed" communication bore the same date as this letter to William Wase, of Broseley, and was addressed "To the Brethren in and about Madeley;" *i.e.*, the Methodists :—

"MY DEAR COMPANIONS IN TRIBULATION,—Peace and mercy, faith, hope, and love be multiplied to you all from the Father of mercies through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of grace! I thank you for your kind remembrance of me in your prayers. I am yet spared to pray for you. O that I had more power with God! I would bring down heaven into all your hearts. Strive together in love for the living faith, the glorious hope, the sanctifying love once delivered to the saints. Look to Jesus. Move on; run yourselves in the heavenly race, and let each sweetly draw his brother along, till the whole company appears before the redeeming God in Sion.

---

[1] James Barry and Robert Costerdine, the two Methodist itinerant preachers stationed in the Chester circuit, of which Madeley and its neighbourhood were a part.

[2] The meeting-house Fletcher had recently erected in Madeley Wood, and which is now a part of the Wesleyan Chapel there.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 47, and the *Christian Miscellany*, 1877, p. 333.

"I hope God will, in His mercy, spare me to see you in the flesh; and if I cannot labour for you, I shall gladly suffer with you. If you will put health into my flesh, joy into my heart, and life into my whole frame, be of *one heart* and of *one soul.* Count nothing your *own* but your *sin* and *shame;* and bury that dreadful property in the grave of our Saviour. Let all you are and have be His who bought you. Dig hard in the *Gospel* mines for hidden treasure. Blow hard the furnace of prayer with the bellows of faith until you are melted into love, and the dross of sin is purged out of every heart. Get together into Jesus, the heavenly ark, and sweetly sail into the ocean of eternity; so shall you be true miners, furnacemen, and bargemen. Farewell, in Jesus! Tell Mrs. Cound I shall greatly rejoice if she remembers Lot's wife."[1]

Six weeks after the date of this letter to the Madeley Methodists, Wesley visited them, and wrote:—

"1779. March 25, *Thursday.* I preached in the new house which Mr. Fletcher has built in Madeley Wood. The people here exactly resemble those at Kingswood, only they are more simple and teachable. But, for want of discipline, the immense pains which he has taken with them has not done them the good which might have been expected. I preached at Shrewsbury in the evening, and next day, about noon, in the assembly-room at Broseley. It was well we were in the shade, for the sun shone as hot as it usually does at midsummer. We walked from thence to Coalbrook Dale, and took a view of the bridge which is shortly to be thrown over the Severn. It is one arch, a hundred feet long, fifty-two high, and eighteen wide; all of cast-iron, weighing many hundred tons. I doubt whether the Colossus at Rhodes weighed much more."[2]

Fletcher's health was still feeble, but he longed to be back to his parishioners and to the Methodists surrounding Madeley. Hence the following to the Vicar of Shoreham:—

"1779, March 29. I am still weak in body, but able to ride out and exhort some children. Well, the time shall come when, in a better state, we shall be able to glorify our heavenly Father. In the meantime, let us do it either in the stocks of weakness or in the fires of tribulation; and on our death-bed may we sing, with hearts overflowing with humble love, 'The Resurrection and the Life, the Friend and Saviour of sinners, loved me and gave Himself for me; and I am going to see Him and to thank Him, face to face, for His matchless love!'

---

[1] Letters, p. 48, and *ibid,* p. 334.
[2] Wesley's Journal.

"I hope the prospect respecting the inheritance of your fathers in this country clears up a little, and I trust the matter will be decided without a lawsuit. As soon as the affair is brought to some conclusion, we design to set out for England. The will of the Lord be done in all things!"[1]

This was written in the week before Easter. The Puritanical Calvinists of Switzerland of course denounced the observance of holy days, and hence, at Nyon, there was no service on Good Friday, April 2; but Fletcher and William Perronet, who all their life had been accustomed to commemorate the death of the incarnate Son of God, crossed the lake into Savoy, to hear a celebrated Capuchin.

"He made," says Mr. Perronet, "a very good discourse, and he and his brethren invited us to dine with them. This we declined; but, after dinner, we paid our respects to them, when Mr. Fletcher spent two or three hours with them in serious and friendly conversation."[2]

Fletcher had expressed a hope that he would be able to return to his flock at Madeley in April or May, but his hope was not realized. The reasons for this will be found in the following extracts from his letters. To his curate, the Rev. Mr. Greaves, he said:—

"Nyon, May 18, 1779. My dear fellow-labourer,—My departure being delayed some weeks gives me much concern, although, from the confidence I have in your pastoral diligence, I am easy about the flock you feed. Last week, a Visitation was held here, and the clergy of the town took my part against the Visitor and others, who said I was of a sect everywhere spoken against. The conversation about it held so long, and was so trying to my grain of humility, that I went out. The matter, however, ended peaceably by a vote that they should invite me to dinner. God ever save us from jealous and persecuting zeal.

"I hope, my dear friend, you go on comfortably, doing more and more the work of an evangelist. Remember my love to as many of my parishioners as you meet with, and especially to all our good neighbours and to the Society."[3]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Letters, 1791, p. 49.

On the same day, he wrote to Michael Onions as follows:—

"I have complied with the request of my friends to stay a little longer among them, as it was backed by a small Society of pious people gathered here. Three weeks ago, they got about me, and on their knees, with many tears, besought me to stay till they were a little stronger and able to stand alone; nor would they rise till they had got me to comply. However, yesterday, I spoke with a carrier, from Geneva, to take me to London, who said he would take us at a fortnight's notice.

"My love to your fellow-leaders, and, by them, to the companies you meet in prayer; also to the preachers who help in the Round[1]."[2]

On May 22, William Perronet, in a letter to his father, observed:—

"On the 9th of this month, Mr. Fletcher preached in the church, on 2 Cor. v. 20—'We are ambassadors for Christ,' etc. He spoke with a strong and clear voice for more than three-quarters of an hour, and did not find himself hurt by it. He has preached four times in the church since I have been here, and might have preached much oftener if his health would have allowed him; for, by his friendly and prudent conduct towards the three ministers of the place, he is upon good terms with them now, although, at his first coming hither, they were afraid to own him, on account of his *irregular conduct;* for such they deemed his exhorting the children, and holding meetings in private houses."[3]

On the same day, Fletcher remarked to the same venerable minister:—

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER, AND HONOURED FATHER,—I rejoice that you are yet preserved to be a witness of the grace and saving health of Jesus. Let us rejoice that when *our* strength shall decay, *His* will remain entire for ever, and, in His strength, we, who take Him for our life, shall be strong. Our Redeemer liveth; and, when sickness and death shall have brought down our flesh to the earth, we shall, by His resurrection's power, rise and live for ever with Him in heavenly places; for the new earth will be a heaven, or a glorious province in the kingdom of heaven. The meek shall inherit it; and that inheritance will be fairer than yours at Chateau d'Oex, and surer too.

"I hope to accompany your son soon to England."[4]

The following, also, was written at the same time, and was addressed to his honoured host and friend, Mr. Charles Greenwood, of Stoke Newington:—

---

[1] The name often given by the old Methodists to a Methodist Circuit.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 51.
[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[4] *Ibid.*

"NYON, *May* 22, 1779.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—"I am yet alive, able to ride out, and now and then to instruct a few children. I hope Mr. Perronet will soon have settled his affairs, and then, please God, I shall inform you, by word of mouth, how much I am indebted to you, Mrs. Greenwood and Mrs. Thornton. Thank and salute, on my behalf, Mr. John and Mr. Charles Wesley, Dr. Coke, and Mr. Atlay.[1] Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gifts,—His Son, His Spirit, and His Word! And thanks be to His people, for their kindness towards the poor, the sick, the stranger, and especially towards me! But, at this time, a sleepless night and a constant toothache unfit me for almost everything but lying down under the cross, kissing the rod, and rejoicing in hope of a better state, in this world or in the next. Perhaps weakness and pain are the best for me in this world. Well, the Lord will choose for me, and I fully set my heart and seal to His choice. Let us not faint in the day of adversity. The Lord tries us, that our faith may be purged of all the dross of self-will, and may work by that love, which beareth all things, and thinketh evil of nothing. Our calling is to follow the crucified, and we must be crucified with Him, until body and soul know the power of His resurrection, and pain and death are done away.

"I hope my dear friend will make, with me, a constant choice of the following mottoes of St. Paul,—*Christ is gain in life and death—Our life is hid with Christ in God—If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him—We glory in tribulation—God will give us rest with Christ in that day—We are saved by hope.* To the Lord our God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, let us give glory *in the fires.* Amen."[2]

Besides his own physical weakness and suffering, Fletcher had other trials in Switzerland. In a letter, written about the same time as the foregoing, he remarked :—

"Let us bear with patience the decays of nature; let us see, without fear, the approach of death. We must put off this sickly, corruptible body, in order to put on the immortal and glorious one. I have some hopes that my poor sister will yet be my sister in Christ. Her self-righteousness, I hope, breaks as fast as her body. I am come hither to see death make havoc among my friends. I wear mourning for my father's brother, and for my brother's son. The same mourning will serve for my dying sister, if I do not go before her. She lies on the same bed where my father and mother died, and where she and I were born. How near is life to death! But, blessed be God, Christ, the Resurrection, is nearer to the weak, dying believer!"[3]

---

[1] Wesley's Book Steward, who, nine years afterwards, seceded from the Methodists, and took possession of a chapel which they had built at Dewsbury.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 272.

[3] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

Fletcher, notwithstanding his longing to get back to his flock at Madeley, was still detained in Switzerland. Hence the following, addressed to Mr. Thomas York:—

"NYON, *July* 18, 1779.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Providence is still gracious to me, and raises me friends on all sides. May God reward them all, and may you have *a double reward* for all your kindness! I hope I am getting a little strength. The Lord has blessed to me a species of black cherry, which I have eaten in large quantities. I have had a return of my spitting blood; but, for a fortnight past, I have catechized the children of the town every day; and I do not find much inconvenience from that exercise. Some of them seem to be under sweet drawings of the Father, and a few of their mothers begin to come, and desire me with tears in their eyes to stay in this country. They urge much my being born here, and I reply, that I was *born again* in England; that is, *of course*, the country which, to me, is the dearer of the two.

"My friends have prevailed on me to publish 'A Poem on the Praises of God,' which I wrote many years ago. The revising it for the press is at once a business and a pleasure, which I go through on horseback. Help me, by your prayers, to ask a blessing on this little attempt.

"I wish I could procure you an estate in this fine country, as I hope to do Mr. Perronet, one of the physicians who showed me so much love when I lay sick at Newington. His grandfather was a Swiss, who was naturalized in the reign of Queen Anne. By calling upon some of his relations, I have found that he is entitled to an estate of some £1000, of which he is come to take possession. So Providence prepares for me a friend, a kind physician, and a fellow-traveller, to accompany me back to England; where one of my chief pleasures will be to embrace you, and to assure you, how much I am, my dear friend, your obliged servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Alas! little did Fletcher think that William Perronet would not return to England.

"Providence," said Fletcher, in the letter just quoted, "raises me friends on all sides." He soon had need of them. In the month of September, William Perronet wrote:—

"Mr. Fletcher has been wont to preach, now and then, in the church here (Nyon), at the request of one or other of the ministers; but, some time ago, he was summoned before the Seigneur Bailiff, who sharply reprehended him for preaching against Sabbath-breaking and stage plays. The former, he said, implied a censure on the magistrates in general, as if they neglected their duty. And the latter he considered as a personal reflection on himself, he having just then sent for a company of French Comedians to come to Nyon. Accordingly, he forbade Mr. Fletcher to exercise, any more, any of the functions of a minister in this country. However, one of the Ministers here has given him a room in his own house to preach in; and here Mr. Fletcher meets a few serious persons, particularly a number of children, two or three times a week. Hitherto, his lordship has not interfered with respect to this mode of exhortation; and both the number and the seriousness of the congregation increase daily."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 53.

Referring to the same incident, Fletcher wrote:—

"Our Lord Lieutenant, being stirred up by some of the clergy, and believing firmly that I am banished from England, took the alarm, and forbade the ministers to let me exhort in their houses; threatening them with the power of the Senate if they did. They all yielded, but are now ashamed of it. A young clergyman, a true Timothy, has opened me his house, where I exhort twice a week; and the other clergymen, encouraged by his boldness, come to our meetings."

William Perronet completes this story by relating that the minister, who began this discreditable opposition, died suddenly, as he was dressing to go to church; and that his successor continued the same intolerant behaviour towards poor, well-meaning Fletcher. Mr. Perronet adds:—

"Mr. Fletcher now thinks himself obliged, before he leaves his native country, to bear a public testimony to the truth. When his writing will be finished, I cannot say, for it multiplies under his fertile pen; so that, I fear, we shall be obliged to spend another winter in this severe climate."[2]

There can be little doubt that the "public testimony," which Fletcher was now composing was his "Portrait of St. Paul," to be noticed anon.

Soon after this, Fletcher had an attack of rheumatism, and wrote as follows to William Perronet, who had gone to Lausanne. After relating that the pain in his left shoulder had deprived him of sleep, and almost crippled him, he added:—

"I have partly recovered the use of my shoulder; but it is still very weak. I drink a decoction of pine-apple, which is as warm as guaiacum. My writing does not go on; but the will of the Lord is done, and that is enough. I would press you to come back soon, if I were not persuaded you are better where you are. I have been afraid that our bad meat here would make you lose your flesh; and, for the honour of Switzerland, I should be glad you had some to carry back to England, if we live to go and see our friends there. I had last Sunday (December 19), a great trial in my family. I see the Lord will not use me in this country for good, and, when we shall have finished our little matters, I shall be glad to go to my spiritual friends, and to my flock; so much the more, as Mr. Ireland mentions my curate's danger of being in a consumption. My compliments and thanks wait on Miss Perronet. She was very obliging to share her drops with me. May we all share the springs of grace and glory together! If you will come a few leagues southward, and try the weather here, your room waits for you, and I shall be glad to see you. In the meantime, keep yourself warm by the Word of God within, and a good fire without. The Lord direct us in all things! Oh for quietness and English friends!"[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] *Ibid.*

Two days after writing this, Fletcher addressed his curate, Mr. Greaves, as follows:—

"NYON, *December* 25, 1779.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—Glory be to God for His unspeakable gift! May that Jesus, that eternal, all-creating, all-supporting, all-atoning, all-comforting Word, which was with God, and is God, and came, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to dwell among men, and to be our Emmanuel, God with us,—may He, by a lively faith, be formed in our hearts; and, by a warm love, lie and grow in the manger of our emptiness, filling it always with the bread that comes down from heaven!

"Though absent in body, I am with you and the flock in spirit. You are now at the Lord's table. O may all the dear people, you have just now preached to, receive Jesus in the pledge of His dying love, and go home with this lively conviction, 'God has given *me* eternal life, and this life is *in His Son!*'

"Glory be to God in heaven! Peace on earth! Love and good-will everywhere! Especially in the place where Providence has called us to cry, '*Behold! what manner of love the Father has testified to us, in Jesus, that we, children of wrath, should be made children of God*, by that only-begotten Son of the Most High, who was born for our regeneration, crucified for our atonement, raised for our justification, and who now triumphs in heaven for our sanctification, for our full redemption, and for our eternal glorification. To Him be glory for ever and ever;' and may all, who fear and love Him about you, say, for ever, Amen! Hallelujah!

"Out of the fulness of my heart, I invite them to do so; but how shallow is my fulness to His! What a drop, compared to an ocean without bottom or shore! Let us, then, receive continually from Him, who is the overflowing and ever-present source of pardoning, sanctifying, and exhilarating grace; and, from the foot of the Wrekin, where you are, to the foot of the Alps, where I am, let us echo back to each other the joyful, thankful cry of the primitive Christians, which was the text here this morning, '*Out of His fulness, we have all received grace for grace.*'

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher;" and *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1825, p. 744.

"I long to hear from you and the flock. How do you go on? Let me know that you cast *joyfully* all your burdens on the Lord. Mr. Ireland sends me word, that Mr. Romaine told him you are not very well. Take care of yourself. Lay nothing to heart. Should your breast be weak, preach but once on Sundays; for you know the evening sermon is not a part of our *stated* duty. I say this, that you may not *over-do*, and lie by, as I do. God direct, sustain, and comfort you in all things!

"Give my pastoral love to all my flock. May all see, and see more abundantly, the salvation of God! May national distress be sanctified unto them; and may they all be loyal subjects of the King of kings, and of His Anointed, our King! May the approaching new year be to them a year of peace and Gospel grace! I hope Molly takes good care of you. God bless her!'"[1]

Fletcher refers to the "national distress." This was great. Parliament was excited. Ireland was in a state of veiled rebellion. England rang with reports of threatened invasion. The war with the American colonists had already added sixty-three millions to the national debt. Trade was paralysed, and taxes were intolerable. Popery had been established in Canada, and had received encouragement in England. The Protestant Association had sprung into existence, and the Gordon riots were at hand. In the midst of this state of things, Fletcher wrote to a nobleman, whose name is not given, but who, probably, was Lord North, as follows:—

"NYON, *December* 15, 1779.

"MY LORD,—If the American Colonies and the West India Islands are rent from the Crown, there will not grow one ear of corn the less in Great Britain. We shall still have the necessaries of life, and, what is more, the Gospel, and liberty to hear it. If the great springs of trade and wealth are cut off, good men will bear that loss without much sorrow; for springs of wealth are always springs of luxury, which, sooner or later, destroy the empires corrupted by wealth. Moral good may come out of our losses. I wish you may see it in England. People on the Continent imagine they see it already in the English on their travels, who are said to behave with more wisdom and less haughtiness than they used to do."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 56.

Lord North, King George the Third's Prime Minister, was, at this time, harassed by the American rebellion, incessantly assailed by the Opposition, and frequently threatened with impeachment. Probably, Fletcher's letter, of which the above is only a part, was intended to help him in his troubles. Though a foreigner by birth, John de la Flechere was a most loyal and devoted subject of King George. Hence, also, the following, taken from a letter to his curate, Mr. Greaves:—

"March 7, 1780. I long to hear from you. I hope you are well, and grow in the love of Christ, and of the souls bought with His blood, and committed to your care. I recommend to you the most helpless of the flock,—I mean the *children* and the *sick*. They most want your help, and they are the most likely to benefit by it; for affliction softens the heart, and children are not yet quite hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

"I beg you will not fail, when you have opportunity, to recommend to our flock, to honour the King, to study to be quiet, and to hold up the hands of the Government by which we are protected."[2]

On the same day, Fletcher wrote to his friend and helper, Mr. William Wase, on another matter which was causing him considerable anxiety. His Methodist meeting-house in Madeley Wood had cost much more than he expected. The letter to Mr. Wase needs no further explanation, except that the work, ready to be printed, was, probably, his poem, in French, entitled, "La Louange."

"NYON, *March* 7, 1780.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I am sorry the building has cost so much more than I intended; but, as the mischief is done, it is a matter to exercise patience, resignation, and self-denial; and it will be a caution in the future. I am going to sell part of my little estate here to discharge the debt. I had laid by £50, to print a small work, which I wanted to distribute here; but, as I must be just, before I presume to offer that mite to *the God of truth*, I abandon the design, and send that sum to Mr. York.

"Money is so scarce here, at this time, that I shall sell at a very great loss; but necessity and justice are two great laws, which must be obeyed. As I design, on my return to England, to pinch until I have got rid of this debt, I may go and live in one of the cottages belonging to the vicar, if we could let the vicarage for a few pounds; and, in that case, I dare say Mr. Greaves would be so good as to take the other little house.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 273.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 57.

"My dear friend, let us die to sin. Hold fast Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Walk by faith in Him; and not by the sight and passions of the old Adam. I hope the sun of affliction, which burns poor England and us, will ripen us all for glory. Give my best love to all our friends in Christ, and tell them that the hope of seeing them does me good."[1]

Fletcher was hard at work; the weather was cold; and, for the present, exercise out of doors was impracticable. The following, taken from an unpublished letter written by William Perronet, contains an amusing scene:—

"Nyon, March 1, 1780. As this is Mr. Fletcher's native village, no wonder that it agrees with him; otherwise, it must be very trying to so tender a constitution as his; for the weather here is much hotter in summer, and much colder in winter, than in England; and the transitions from intense heat to extreme cold are often very sudden.

"Mr. Fletcher was once told by two physicians (somewhere), that the benefit of exercise, for consumptive persons, must be estimated by the violence of it; consequently, that riding on horseback was better than going in a carriage, that walking was better than riding, running than walking, and jumping better than all of them put together. Our worthy friend has scrupulously followed this maxim; so that, whenever he does not take his little hasty rides (which by-the-bye frequently occurs), he allows himself, for exercise, not more than three minutes, from his studies, just as dinner is being served, and then, like harlequin, he takes about half a score such violent leaps and plunges across the room, that I am *sometimes* in pain for the floor, and *always* for his bones."

During the year 1779, Fletcher and William Perronet had lodged in the same house in Nyon; now, as might be expected from the foregoing extract, William Perronet's state of health obliged him to seek a more salubrious situation. He went to Lausanne; Fletcher remained at Nyon; and was thus pictured by his friend in the month of July next ensuing:—

"About half a year ago, we broke up housekeeping at Nyon. Poor dear Mr. Fletcher, with difficulty, procured a miserable lodging in the neighbourhood; and I was obliged to go to Lausanne, which is seven leagues from Nyon. I submitted the more willingly to this, because he talked of spending some time at Lausanne. I have been disappointed in this respect; but, once or twice, I have had the pleasure of seeing him at Nyon. I found him to-day sitting in his small apartment, surrounded with books and papers, writing, or, as he expressed it, 'finishing the *first part*' of one of his pieces. When the *whole* is likely to be finished, one cannot pretend to say."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 58.

Fletcher intended to return to England in the month of September, but two occurrences prevented him. First of all, he mislaid a portion of the manuscript which he wished to publish before he left Switzerland, and had to re-write what was missing.

"The misfortune I hinted at," said he to William Perronet, "was the mislaying of a considerable part of my manuscript. After giving it up as lost, I fell to work again; went through the double toil; and, when I had done, last night, I accidentally found what I had mislaid. This has thrown me back a great deal. The Lord's will be done in all things! I thank God, I have been kept from fretting on the occasion; though I would not for a great deal have such another trial."[2]

Added to this, and, perhaps, partly in consequence of it, his health relapsed. These, and other matters, are referred to in the following letter, addressed to his curate, Mr. Greaves:—

"NYON, *September* 15, 1780.

"MY DEAR FELLOW-LABOURER,—I had fixed the time of my departure for this month; but now two hindrances stand in my way. When I came to collect the parts of my manuscript, I found the most considerable part wanting; and, after a thousand searches, I was obliged to write it over again. This accident compelled me to put off my journey; and now the change of weather has brought back some symptoms of my disorder. I speak, or rather whisper, with difficulty; but I hope the quantity of grapes I begin to eat will have as good an effect upon me as in the last two autumns.

"Have patience then a little while. If things are not as you could wish, you can do but as I have done for many years,—*learn patience by the things which you suffer*. Crossing our will, getting the better of our inclinations, and growing in experience, are no mean advantages, and they may all be yours.

"Mr. Ireland writes me word that if I return to England now, the winter will undo all I have been doing for my health for many years. However, I have not quite laid aside the design of spending the winter with you; but don't expect me till you see me. I am, nevertheless, firmly purposed that, if I do not set out this autumn, I shall do so next spring, as early as I can.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] *Ibid.*

"Till I had this relapse, I was able to exhort, in a private room, three times a week; but the Lord Lieutenant will not allow me to get into a pulpit, though they permit the schoolmasters, who are laymen, to put on a band and read the Church prayers; so high runs the prejudice. The clergy, however, tell me that if I will renounce my ordination, and get Presbyterian Orders among them, they will allow me to preach, and on these terms one of the ministers of this town offers me his curacy. A young clergyman of Geneva, tutor to my nephew, appears to me a truly converted man; and he is so pleased when I tell him there are converted souls in England, that he will go with me to learn English, and converse with the British Christians. He wrote last summer, with such force, to some of the clergy, who are stirring up the fire of persecution, that he made them ashamed, and we have since had peace from that quarter.

"There is little genuine piety in these parts; nevertheless, there is yet some of *the form* of it; so far as to go to the Lord's table regularly four times a year. There meet the adulterers, the drunkards, the swearers, the infidels, and even the materialists. They have no idea of the double damnation that awaits hypocrites. They look upon the partaking of that sacrament as a ceremony enjoined by the magistrate. At Zurich, the first town of this country, they have lately beheaded a clergyman who wanted to betray his country to the Emperor, to whom it chiefly belonged. It is the town of the great reformer, Zuinglius; yet there they poisoned the sacramental wine a few years ago. I mention this to show you there is great need to bear a testimony against the faults of the clergy here; and, if I cannot do it from the pulpit, I must try to do it from the press. Their canons, which were composed by two hundred and thirty pastors, at the time of the Reformation, are so spiritual and apostolic that I design to translate them into English, if I am spared.

"Farewell, my dear brother. Take care, *good*, *constant*, *care* of the flock committed to your charge; especially *the sick* and *the young* Salute all our dear parishioners. Let me still have a part in your prayers, public and private; and rejoice in the Lord, as, through grace, I am enabled to do in all my little tribulations."[1]

On the same day, Fletcher wrote to Mr. Thomas York:—

"I have been so well, that my friends here thought of giving me a wife; but what should I do with a *Swiss wife* at Madeley? I want rather an English nurse; but more still a mighty Saviour, and, thanks be to

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 60.

God! that I have. Help me to rejoice in that never-dying, never-moving Friend.

"Having heard that my dear friend Ireland has discharged the greatest part of my debt, I have not sent the money; but I hope to bring with me £100, to reimburse my friends in part, till I can do it altogether. But I shall never be able to pay you the debt of kindness I have contracted with you. I look to Jesus, my Surety, for that. May He repay you a thousand-fold!"[1]

To William Wase, the good old Methodist, Fletcher wrote, at the same time:—

"Give my love and thanks to the preachers" (William Boothby and Jonathan Hern) "who come to help us. Enforce my exhortation to the Societies in much love. Go and comfort, from me, Mrs. Palmer and Mrs. Cartwright; and, since God has placed you all in a widowed state, agree to take Jesus for a never-dying Friend and Bridegroom. Your Maker is your husband. He is all in all. What, then, have you lost? Christ is *yours* and *all things with Him*. The resurrection day will soon come. Prepare yourselves for the marriage feast of the Lamb; and till then, rejoice in the *expectation* of that day. I sympathize with our sickly friends, widow Matthews, M. Blummer, E. Whittaker, I. York, and S. Aston. Salute them kindly from me. Help them to trim their lamps, and to wait for the Bridegroom. Thank Thomas and Nelly Fennel for their love to the" (Methodist) "preachers, and give them mine, and also give it to the little companies they meet with, to call for strength, comfort, and help, in time of need. Fare ye all well in Jesus! I say, again, farewell!"[2]

Fletcher's "Exhortation" to the Methodist Societies was as follows:—

"To the Societies in and about Madeley.

"Grace and peace, truth and love, be multiplied to you all. Stand fast in the Lord, my dear brethren. Stand fast in Jesus; stand fast to one another; stand fast to the vow we have so often renewed together, upon our knees, and at the Lord's table. Don't be *so unloving, so cowardly*, as to let one of your little company fall into the hands of the world and the devil; and agree to crucify the body of sin altogether.

"I am still in a strait between the work which Providence cuts out for me here, and the love which draws me to you. When I shall have the pleasure of seeing you, let it not be embittered by the sorrow of finding any of you half-hearted and lukewarm. Let me find you all strong in the Lord, and increased in humble love. Salute from me all who followed with us fifteen years ago. Care still for your old brethren.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 62.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 61.

Let there be no Cain among you, no Esau, no Lot's wife. Let the love of David and Jonathan, heightened by that of Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and our Lord, shine in all your *thoughts*, your *tempers*, your *words*, your *looks*, and your *actions*. If you love one another, your little meetings will be a renewed feast; and the God of love, who is peculiarly present where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, will abundantly bless you. Bear me still upon your breasts in prayer, as I do you upon mine; and rejoice with me that the Lord, who made, redeemed, and comforts us, *bears us all upon His*. I am yours in Him,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

For some time after his arrival in Switzerland, Fletcher lived in the house where he was born, a respectable old building, erected on an elevated site at the extremity of the town. Close at hand was the shady wood, where he used to read, meditate, and pray, and meet his flock of little children. Near the house was a terrace, from which the whole of the glorious lake of Geneva was visible; and, in the distance, might be seen the city itself. Towering above all, there was the unutterably grand Mont Blanc. No wonder Fletcher spoke of the "pleasant apartment" where he was born, as having "one of the finest prospects in the world." For some reason, however, he now exchanged the house of his nativity for another not so enchanting. Hence the following letter to William Perronet, who was residing at Lausanne:—

"NYON, *October* 3, 1780.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for your letters. They have given me much pleasure, as I see that you will at last end your business, and get ready to set out in the spring with Mr. Ireland, who comes with his family, I know not where; but I think he will spend the winter at or about Avignon. If you will go and join him, I shall be glad to go also, for the *stream under this house* does not make it very wholesome.

"My brother thinks, as well as myself, that you may conclude upon the terms you mention. 'Better a dinner of herbs with peace, than a stalled ox and noise therewith.'

"I hope to go to Lausanne, directly after vintage, to offer a manuscript to the censors, to see if they will allow its being published; so I do not invite you to share my *damp bed*. My sister was so kind as to look for another house, but we find none to let under a year. We are here travellers, so we must expect some difficulties and a good many inconveniences.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 63.

"If Mr. Ireland goes to Marseilles, you might go and see your cousin there. Lift up your heart, and see by faith our Lord and Saviour, our heavenly Kinsman and Brother; and when you rise there, take by the hand of prayer your affectionate friend,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

Soon after this, William Perronet was seized with mortal illness. In a letter to the Vicar of Shoreham, Fletcher wrote:—

"December 5, 1780. Our wise and good God sees fit to try my dear friend, your son, with a want of appetite and uneasiness in his bowels. He also often returns the little food he takes. Some time ago, he came to Nyon, from Lausanne, and we went together to Geneva, where we settled your affair with three of the Geneva co-heirs, upon the same footing as he had settled with those of Chateau d'Oex. He bears his weakness with much patience and resignation."[2]

Fletcher was now employed in finishing the poem, which he wished to publish before he left Switzerland; but he delighted in spending as much time with his dying friend as possible.

"Every night," says William Perronet, in a letter dated January 22, 1781, "after praying with me, he sings this verse at parting:—

"'Then let our humble faith address
His mercy and His power;
We shall obtain delivering grace
In the distressing hour.'"[3]

Within three weeks after this, Fletcher's book was finished, and the business of William Perronet was ended. Fletcher wished to set out for England, but was still detained in Switzerland. Hence the following, addressed to Mr. Wase:—

"NYON, *February* 14, 1781.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for your kind remembrance of me. I need not be urged to return; brotherly love draws me to Madeley, and circumstances drive me hence.

"I am exceeding glad that there is a revival on your side the water" [the river Severn], "and that you are obliged to enlarge your Room.[4] I wish I could contribute to shake the dry bones in my parish, but I have no confidence in the flesh. What I could not do when I was in my strength, I have little prospect of doing now that my strength is broken. However, I don't despair, for the work is not *mine* but the *Lord's*. If the few who love the Gospel would be simple and zealous, God would again hear their prayers for those who are content to go on in the broad way. I thank you for your view of the iron bridge.[1]

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1830, p. 831.
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher.'
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] The Methodist meeting-house.

"My friend Ireland invites me to join him in the South of France; and I long to see whether I could not have more liberty to preach the Word among Papists than among Protestants. But it is so little that I can do, that I doubt much whether it is worth while going so far upon so little a chance. If I were stronger, and had more time, the fear of *being hanged* should not detain me. I trust to set out next month, and to be in England in May; it won't be my fault if it is not in April.

"I am here in the midst of rumours of war. The burghers of Geneva have disarmed the garrison, and taken possession of one of the gates. I had, however, the luck to get in, and to bring away my nephew, who is a student there. Troops are preparing to block them up. The Lord may, at this time, punish the repeated backslidings of those Laodicean Christians, most of whom have become infidels. This event may a little retard my journey, as I must pass through Geneva. It also puts off the printing of my manuscript, for there is nothing going on in that unhappy town but disputes, and fights, and mounting of guards.

"Remember me in much love to Mr. Greaves, Mr. Gilpin, and the" [Methodist] "preachers who labour with us." [2]

At the same date, Fletcher wrote to Mr. John Owen, his schoolmaster at Madeley, as follows:—

"Nyon, February 14, 1781. I thank you, my dear brother, for your kind lines. I hope you help both Mr. Greaves and the" [Methodist] "preachers to stir up the people in my parish. Be *much* in prayer. Take counsel with Michael Onions, Mrs. Palmer, and Molly Cartwright about the most effectual means to recover the backsliders, and to keep together to Christ and to each other those who still hold their shield. Salute them kindly from me, and tell them that I hope they will give me a good account of their little companies" [Methodist classes] "and of themselves.

"If I were not a minister, I would be a *schoolmaster*, to have the pleasure of bringing up children in the fear of the Lord. That pleasure is yours; relish it, and it will comfort and strengthen you in your work. The joy of the Lord and of charity is our strength. Salute the children from me, and tell them I long to show them the way to happiness and heaven. Have you mastered the stiffness and shyness of your temper?

---

[1] The bridge across the Severn at Coalbrookdale, the first iron bridge erected in England; cast in 1779, under the direction of Mr. Abraham Darby.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 67.

Charity gives *a meekness*, *an affability*, *a child-like simplicity and openness*, which nature has denied you. Let me find you shining by these virtues, and you will revive me much. God bless your labour about the sheep and the lambs!

"Read the following note to all who fear God and love Jesus and each other, assembling in Madeley church:—

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—My heart leaps with joy at the thought of coming to see you and bless the Lord with you. Let us not stay to praise Him till we see each other. Let us see Him in His Son, in His works, and in all the members of Christ. How slow will post-horses go in comparison of love! Meet me, as I do you, in *spirit;* and we shall not stay till April or May to bless God together. *Now* will be the time of union and love."[1]

For another month Fletcher was detained at Nyon, when he wrote to Michael Onions the following:—

"NYON, *March* 1781.

"I thank you, my dear brother, for your kind remembrance of me, and for your letters. I hope to bring my fuller thanks to you in person.

"Hold up your hands. Confirm the feeble knees. Set up an Ebenezer every hour of the day. In everything give thanks; and, in order to this, pray without ceasing, and rejoice evermore. My heart sympathizes with poor Molly Cartwright. Tell her, from me, that her husband lives in Him who is the Resurrection. In Christ there is no death, but the victory over death. O! let us live in Him, to Him, for Him, who more than repairs all our losses. My love to your wife. Tell her she promised me to be Jesus's, as well as yours. My love to John Owen and all our other" [Methodist] "leaders, and by them to the few who do not tire by the way. With regard to the others, despair of none. Charity hopeth all things, and brings many things to pass. All things are *possible* to him that believeth; all things are *easy* to him that loveth. God be with you, and make you faithful unto death! This is my prayer for you, and all the Society, and all my dear parishioners, to whom I beg to be remembered. I have no place to write their names, but I pray they may all be written *in the book of life*. God is merciful, gracious, and faithful. I set my seal to His lovingkindness. Witness my heart and hand, "J. FLETCHER."[2]

Fletcher had promised to join Mr. Ireland at Montpelier; but, meanwhile, William Perronet, who had returned to Lausanne, was so much worse in health, that it was impossible for him to accompany his friend. Two days before leaving Switzerland, Fletcher visited him, and, in a letter to the aged Vicar of Shoreham, wrote:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 65.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 68.

"Miss Perronet and her mother[1] are as kind to him as my dear friends at Stoke Newington were to me when I lay sick there. His mind is quite easy; he is sweetly resigned to the will of God."[2]

At Montpelier, Fletcher overtaxed his strength; and at Lyons, on his way to England, wrote as follows to his sick and dying friend, whom he had been obliged to leave behind him:—

"LYONS, *April* 6, 1781.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—We are both weak, both afflicted; but Jesus careth for us. He is everywhere, and here He has all power to deliver us; and He may do it by ways we little think of: 'As Thou wilt, when Thou wilt, and where Thou wilt,' said Baxter: let us say the same. It was of the Lord you did not come with me: you would have been sick as I am. I am overdone with riding and preaching. I preached twice in the fields. I carry home with me much weakness and a pain in the back, which I fear will end in the gravel. The Lord's will be done! I know I am called to suffer and die. The journey tires me; but, through mercy, I bear it. Let us believe and rejoice in the Lord Jesus."[3]

Three weeks after this, Fletcher preached in City Road Chapel, London, and, the next day (April 28), set out to the hospitable home of his friend, Mr. Ireland, at Brislington. At this time, one of the Methodist preachers, stationed in the Bristol circuit, was Thomas Rankin, who had spent nearly five years in America, and who, in 1778, had been driven home by the American rebellion. Hearing of Fletcher's arrival at Brislington, Rankin went to visit him, and wrote:—

"I had such an interview with him as I shall never forget. I had not seen him for upwards of ten years. His looks, his salutation, and his address, struck me with wonder, solemnity, and joy. We retired into Mr. Ireland's garden; and he began to inquire concerning the work of God in America. I gave him a full account of everything that he wished to know. During this relation, he stopped me six times, and, in the shadow of the trees, poured out his soul to God, for the prosperity of the work, and for our brethren there. He several times called upon me, also, to commend them to God in prayer. This was an hour never to be forgotten. Before we parted, I engaged him to come to Bristol, on the Monday following, to meet the select band in the forenoon, and to preach in the evening. During the hour he spent with the select band, the room appeared as 'the house of God, and the gate of heaven.' At night, he preached from, 'We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' The whole congregation was in tears. He spoke like one who had but just left the converse of God and angels. The different conversations I had with him, and his prayers and preaching, during the few days he stayed at Bristol and Brislington, were attended with such effects upon me, that, for some months afterwards, not a cloud intervened between God and my soul, no, not for one hour. Of all the men I ever knew, I never saw such love to God and man, such deadness to the world, such entire consecratedness to Jesus, as in him. It often appeared to me that his every breath was prayer and praise. He lived more like a disembodied spirit than a human being."[1]

---

[1] Probably William Perronet's aunt and cousin; certainly not his mother and sister.

[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[3] *Ibid.*

When at Marseilles, on his way to Switzerland, in March, 1778, Fletcher wrote a long letter,[2] to Miss Bosanquet, on Christian Perfection, and respecting his unpublished Essay on the New Birth. Miss Bosanquet replied to that, in a letter dated August 30, 1778. Strange to say, this letter was not put into Fletcher's hands until nearly three years afterwards. During this interval, there seems to have been no correspondence between him and the lady who was speedily to become his wife. On his return from Switzerland, he wrote her the following, which is now for the first time published:—

"BRISLINGTON, NEAR BRISTOL, *May* 1, 1781.

"DEAR MADAM,—Your kind favour dated August 30, 1778, having been mislaid in a drawer and forgotten, did not come into my hands till this morning. I hope my speedy taking of the pen, to acknowledge so unexpected a favour, will atone for the forgetfulness of my friend.

"You speak, Madam, of *a letter from Bath;* I do not recollect, at present, your having favoured me with one from that place. Is it my lot to be tried, or disappointed in this respect? Well, the hairs of our heads, and the letters of our friends, are all numbered: not one of the former falls, not one of the latter miscarries, without the will of Him, to whose orders we have long since fully and cheerfully subscribed.

"I have sincerely aimed at truth in writing the Essay you have been so kind as to peruse.[3] If I am not mistaken, Dr. Coke told me, when I passed through London, that he had it; but I went out of town in such a hurry that I had not time to take it with me. I feel the propriety of your remarks, and shall make the alterations you mention, as soon as I shall have the manuscript.

---

[1] Thomas Rankin's MS. Journal.
[2] See the letter dated "March 7, 1778."
[3] His "Essay on the New Birth."

"I had thought of what you name, respecting a *less plan* of the doctrine of the New Birth,—a plan calculated to make way for the larger essay, and to guide into the truth those who have never taken one step without the leading strings of prejudice, and who cannot judge of a doctrine if it be not brought within the narrow compass and focus of their understanding. I shall be glad of an opportunity of consulting you about that sketch, if I live to make it. I love *truth*, because I love *Jesus;* but I am, every way, too feeble an instrument to defend and hold it forth with success. Your thought about it makes me pray with earnestness that I may, in some degree, answer your too favourable opinion of the importance of my little attempts to vindicate, or clear up, some part of the Gospel truths.

"Alas! what am I? A cracked voice crying in the wilderness;—a blunted pen scribbling in a village. Thanks be to grace, however, I sincerely desire to be a living shadow of the Divine Man, who is truth and love incarnate. I sincerely desire to embrace those great and precious promises given unto us, whereby we may become partakers of the Divine nature. I will not rest in the first Comforter, so as to slight that *other Comforter*, who is to abide with us for ever. I want not only to see Jesus *altogether lovely*, but to feel Him *altogether powerful and wise*, both in myself and in all my fellow-Christians. Restless, resigned for this, I wait for this. My vehement soul is on the stretch. Some tell me I carry my views too high; but how can that be, if God can do in us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think? Is not the soul joined completely to the Lord, *one spirit with Him?* Are we not called to come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ? Is a dwarf's state of grace the full prize of our high calling? If this hope preys upon my feeble frame, I dare not cast it off: let me rather die a martyr to it than lose it. Why should there not be true martyrs for the hope, as well as for the faith of the Gospel? At all events, let us wait for the great salvation of God the Spirit. Against hope, let us believe in hope that we shall see *the royal priesthood* clothed with Divine righteousness, and all God's saints rejoice and sing.

"The openness with which you mention what some *might* call *your enthusiasm*, makes me reveal to you, Madam, what some call *mine.* I own I do not believe that Scripture repealed, 'Your young men shall see visions; your old men shall dream dreams.' 'These signs shall follow them that believe,' etc. (See Mark xvi. 17, 18). 'My sons and my daughters shall prophesy.' 'Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy' (1 Cor. xiv. 2). Shall I offend you, if I ask you in simplicity the following questions? Do you know any soul filled with all the fulness of God? Anyone walking as Christ also walked, and able to say, in truth, 'As He was, so are we in this world?' Do you know any knit together in love, sharing all the riches of *the full assur-*

ance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of Christ in us the hope of glory (Col. i. 27; ii. 2)? Or, are the professors about you (far from having the full assurance of understanding with respect to this mystery) ready to say, when one speaks of this mystery, 'Thou bringest strange things to our ears'?

"If you condescend to favour me with an answer, please to direct it to me at Madeley, Salop. There I hope to be next week. In the meantime, I pray the Lord to give us an understanding, that we may know more of Him, and be completely in His Son Jesus Christ, that is, in the true, Divine, and eternal life. May the living unction be and abide with you! I ask it ardently for you; condescend to ask it also for, dear Madam, your obliged friend and servant in the Gospel,

"J. FLETCHER.

"P.S.—The third part, which I designed to add[1] to the 'Essay on the New Birth,' was an application to the disciples of Moses, of John, and of Jesus glorified; to those who have the fear of God, the faith of the Son, and the love of the Spirit. My health is mended, thanks be to God! but my lungs remain weak. Please to remember me in Christian love to Sister Crosby.

"Miss Bosanquet,
"At Cross Hall,
"Near *Leads* (*sic*),
"Yorkshire."

A few days after the date of this letter, Fletcher, accompanied by Mr. Ireland, returned to Madeley, having been absent from his flock since November 1776,—four years and a-half.

---

[1] This was not added.

CHAPTER XXII.

LITERARY WORK DONE IN RETIREMENT.

FLETCHER'S long seclusion from public life is well described in two lines of the poet Thompson:

> "*Retirement,* rural quiet, friendship, books,
> Progressive virtue, and approving Heaven."

The four and a-half years, during which he was away from Madeley, were spent in great weakness, but not in idleness. To say nothing of the works he published, while he remained in England, namely, his "Answer to the Rev. Mr. Toplady's 'Vindication of the Divine Decrees;'" his "Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to our American Colonies;'" his "American Patriotism;" his "Doctrines of Grace and Justice;" and his "Plan of Reconciliation;" he was employed, whilst in Switzerland, upon two of the most remarkable productions of his fertile genius.

The first was a poem, in the French language, and was published in Geneva, with the title "La Louange;"—a paraphrastic expansion of Psalm cxlviii. The work was conceived in England, but was written in Switzerland. Fletcher says he "was favoured with the critical remarks of many persons distinguished for their learning, taste, and the works with which they had enriched the Church, and the Republic of Letters. At the end of certain Cantos, are Notes, or small Dissertations, serving to explain, or illustrate, some of the truths inserted in the body of the work." According to the custom of the country and the age, before the book could be published, it had to be submitted to an official appointed to read manuscripts, previous to their being printed; and the following was the approbation given to Fletcher's Poem:—

"I have read this work, which, in my judgment, everywhere breathes Piety, Faith, and Christian Charity.

"DE BONS, *Censeur.*"

After his return to England, Fletcher enlarged the work, and, in 1785, published an edition, still in the French language, with the title:—"La Grace et la Nature, Poëme—Seconde Edition plus complète. A Londre. De l'Imprimerie de R. Hindmarsh, Clerkenwell Close; Chez T. Longman, dans Paternoster Row; à Dublin Chez J. Charrnier, dans Kapel Street; et près du Pont de fer, in Shropshire, 1785," 8vo 442 pp. By permission, the book was dedicated, "A la Reine de la Grande Bretagne." The dedication, dated "à Madeley près de Coalbrook-dale, dans la Comté de Salop, le 6 de Sept. 1784," was characteristic, and as follows:—

"MADAM,—The parish, which, in the centre of your kingdom, produced an iron bridge,[1] being always fruitful in singularities, has now produced a French poem: His Majesty gave a favourable reception to the model of our bridge, and will Your Majesty refuse the dedication of our poem? The solidity of an iron bridge sustained by two rocks renders useless the support of a Royal hand; but a work on devotion has not the same solidity.

"A French Poem in England will always require support; but, if the subject be religious, a powerful protection becomes doubly necessary; and where can I find, among mortals, a more firm security than your august name? Your court, Madam, admits the French language; your generous heart cherishes moral virtues; your exalted mind is pleased to encourage the cultivation of the fine Arts, among which poetry occupies the first rank. And, if a Queen of England permitted Voltaire to dedicate to her the praises of a French Monarch,[2] your piety, Madam, will not refuse those of the King of kings, celebrated in a poem, which has for its argument the divine song of a Sovereign, and the third Canto of which regards Kings and Princes.

"May your Majesty, constantly surrounded with the most precious benedictions, never stand in need of the consolations offered to the afflicted in the ninth Canto! And, when you have long beheld that happy and sweet peace flourish, which is celebrated in this poem,[3] may you, without sorrow, exchange your heavy crown for one of those brilliant diamonds reserved for princes, who serve God, and cause righteousness to flourish in the earth! These are the ardent prayers of him who has the honour to be, with that profound respect, which virtue truly merits when united to greatness,

---

[1] The bridge across the Severn, at Coalbrook Dale, regarded as one of the wonders of the age.

[2] Voltaire's "Henriade," printed in London in 1726, was dedicated to the Queen of George I.

[3] "An Essay on the Peace of 1783," also written in French, and now incorporated with "La Grace et la Nature."

"Madam, your majesty's most humble and devoted servant,

"J. W. FLETCHER."

In his preface, Fletcher says:—

> "A former edition of this poem was entitled '*Praise*,'[1] because the writer's principal design was to impress his readers with the force of these words, '*Offer to the Lord the sacrifice of praise.*' It is now presented to the public with alterations, and the addition of ten new Cantos, under the title of '*Grace and Nature;*' or a descant on creation, as productive of the praise due to the great Creator."

The book is a remarkable one. Every creature of God, animate and inanimate, except devils and damned men in hell, seems to be called upon to unite in offering praise to God. That Fletcher throbbed with the poetic fire cannot, in fairness, be denied. Perhaps some of his thoughts are fanciful; and his work, in other respects, may be imperfect; but many of his conceptions and utterances are worthy not only of being read, but of being remembered. The following quotations, taken from a translation of it by the Rev. Miles Martindale, may furnish a faint idea of its style and merits.

Like other poets, Fletcher begins with prayer for supernatural inspiration:—

> "Thou Glorious Power, whom thrones supernal praise,
> Eternal source of life, of love, and grace;
> While joyful throngs surround Thy shining seat,
> Behold a worm low-bending at Thy feet!
> His darkness chase with Thy all-cheering ray;
> On his weak reason shed celestial day;
> His breast transform with renovating fire,
> With harmony divine his soul inspire."

It has been already stated that a wood adjoined the house where Fletcher resided at Nyon, and that this was one of his favourite resorts for prayer, reading, and meditation, and that here he was accustomed to instruct his congregation of little children. There can be no doubt that the ensuing lines are descriptive of Fletcher's enjoyments in this sylvan cathedral:—

---

[1] The title, in French, was "La Louange."

"Ye solemn woods, where music loves to dwell,
Whose zephyrs breathe the sweet balsamic smell;
Here kindles piety divinely bright,
The heart replete with love and joyous light.
To crown the lay, the feather'd nations raise
Their notes with mine, to sound the Eternal's praise;
While innocence inspires the sacred song,
Ten thousand throats the swelling theme prolong.
Amid these happy groves, see Eden shine,
Than Bourbons' pompous gardens, more divine.
Fly the vile orchestra, where impious tongues
Soft warble vice in loose lascivious songs.
'Tis here, 'mid zephyrs' mild and melting strains,
Lost Paradise her pristine bliss regains."

One more quotation must suffice. It is taken from a long description of the Lake of Geneva. After apostrophizing the divine Creator, who has "in heaven" His "dwelling-place," Fletcher proceeds:—

"Thy bless'd serenity, Thy palace fair,
The sleeping waters of this lake declare.
To give mankind an emblem of Thy might,
An image of Thy skill supremely bright,
Thy plastic hand drew the rough rocks around,
And scoop'd the wondrous vale, a gulf profound;
Where winding Rhone his active force resigns,
And, in wild fields of ice, resplendent shines.
To shadow heaven, and the fair scene unfold,
This lake with azure glows, and burnished gold;
What brilliant rays, what awful glories stand,
To show the wonders of Thy mighty hand!"

To several of the cantos of his poem, Fletcher attaches lengthened notes, in prose; most of them levelled against the infidelity of Voltaire, Rosseau, and the Unitarians.

Leaving the poem, "La Grace et la Nature," another of Fletcher's works in Switzerland must be briefly noticed. This also was written in the French language; and after Fletcher's death was translated, and published with the following title: "The Portrait of St. Paul; or, the true Model for Christians and Pastors: translated from the French Manuscript of the late Rev. John William de la Flechere, Vicar of Madeley. To which is added, Some Account of the Author, by the Rev. Joshua Gilpin, Vicar of Rockwardine, in the County of Salop. In two volumes. Shrewsbury. 1790." 12mo, pp. 377 and 330.

Mr. Gilpin was an ardent admirer of Fletcher, as his biographical "Notes" amply show. He had been a resident in Fletcher's vicarage, and had enjoyed the unspeakable benefit of his example, prayers, and instruction. He writes:—

> "Before I was of sufficient age to take holy orders, I thankfully embraced the offered privilege of spending a few months beneath the roof of this exemplary man; and I well remember how solemn an impression was made upon my heart by the manner in which he received me. He met me at his door with a look of inexpressible benignity; and, conducting me by the hand into his house, intimated a desire of leading me immediately into the presence of that God to whom the government of his little family was ultimately submitted. Instantly he fell upon his knees and poured out an earnest prayer that my present visit might be rendered both advantageous and comfortable, and that our society might be crowned by an intimate fellowship with Christ. This may serve as a specimen of the manner in which he was accustomed to receive his guests.
>
> "In his social prayers, he paid but little attention to those rules which have been laid down with respect to the composition and order of such devotional exercises. His words flowed spontaneously, and without premeditation, though always wonderfully adapted to the occasion. Nothing impertinent, artificial, or superfluous appeared in his addresses to the Deity. His prayers were the prayers of faith; always fervent, often effectual, and invariably a mingled flow of supplication and gratitude, humility and confidence, resignation and fervour, adoration and love.
>
> "Of his secret supplications, He alone can judge 'who seeth in secret.' His closet was his favourite retirement, to which he constantly retreated whenever his public duties allowed him a season of leisure. Here, in times of uncommon distress, he continued during whole nights in prayer before God; and that part of the wall, against which he was accustomed to kneel, appeared deeply stained with the breath he had spent in fervent worship."

In the preface to his translation, Mr. Gilpin remarks:—

> "The following work was begun, and nearly completed, in the course of Mr. Fletcher's last residence at Nyon; where it formed a valuable part of his private labours during a long and painful confinement from

public duty.[1] On his return to England, he suffered the manuscript to lie by him, intending, at his leisure, to translate and prepare it for the press. After his decease, Mrs. Fletcher discovered it, and the translator, finding it a work of no common importance, was readily induced to render it into English. The *Portrait of St. Paul* was originally intended for publication in the author's native country, to which its arguments and quotations apply with peculiar propriety. It contains Mr. Fletcher's last and best thoughts upon some of the most important subjects that can occupy the human mind."

Unfortunately, Fletcher's "Portrait of St. Paul" has, at the present day, but few readers. At the beginning of the century, it was one of the text-books of the Methodist itinerant preachers; and, even within the last forty years, the *Methodist Magazine* spoke of it as an "admirable work" and an "inestimable volume."[2] Methodists, now-a-days, too often prefer ornament to truth.

The traits of St. Paul upon which Fletcher descants are the following: his early piety; his Christian piety; his intimate union with Christ by faith; his extraordinary vocation to the holy ministry, and in what that ministry chiefly consists; his entire devotion to Jesus Christ; his strength and his arms; his power to bind, to loose, and to bless in the name of the Lord; the earnestness with which he began and continued to fill up the duties of his vocation; the manner in which he divided his time between prayer, preaching, and thanksgiving; the fidelity with which he announced the severe threatenings and consolatory promises of the Gospel; his profound humility; the ingenuous manner in which he acknowledged and repaired his errors; his detestation of party spirit and divisions; his rejection of praise; his universal love; his particular love to the faithful; his love to those whose faith was wavering; his love to his countrymen and his enemies; his love to those whom he knew only by report; his charity towards the poor; his charity towards sinners; the condescension of his humble charity; his courage in defence of truth; his prudence in frustrating the designs of his enemies; his tenderness toward others, and his severity toward himself; his love never degenerated into cowardice; his perfect disinterestedness; his condescension in labouring with his own hands; his respect for the holy estate of matrimony; the ardour of his love; his generous fears and succeeding consolation; the grand subject of his glorying; his patience and fortitude; his firmness before magistrates; his courage in consoling his persecuted brethren; his humble confidence in producing the seals of his ministry; his readiness to seal with his blood the truths of the Gospel; the sweet suspense of his choice between life and death; the constancy of his zeal and diligence to the end of his course; his triumphs over the evils of life and the terrors of death.

---

[1] Mrs. Fletcher says, her husband told her the manuscript "was a rough draft, written in his illness when abroad, and which he intended to re-write and to improve." ("Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore, p. 395.)

[2] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1845, p. 74.

After this follows "The Portrait of Lukewarm Ministers and False Apostles;" then Fletcher answers "Objections" to the "Portrait of St. Paul;" and next, with consummate ability, states "The Doctrines of an Evangelical Pastor;" and concludes with "An Essay on the Connexion of Doctrines with Morality," in answer to the infidel philosophy of Voltaire and Rosseau, recently deceased. The last two sections are invaluable, and exhibit Fletcher in all the strength of his sanctified genius.

To make selections from so comprehensive a work as this is difficult, but the following specimens may be acceptable and useful:—

The faithful pastor.—"The disposition of a faithful pastor is, in every respect, diametrically opposed to that of a worldly minister. If you observe the conversation of an ecclesiastic who is influenced by the spirit of the world, you will hear him intimating either that he has, or that he would not be sorry to have, the precedency among his brethren; to live in a state of affluence and splendour, and to secure to himself such distinguished appointments as would increase both his dignity and his income, without making any extraordinary addition to his pastoral labours. You will find him anxious to be admitted into the best companies, and occasionally forming parties for the chase, or some other vain amusement. While the true pastor cries out, in the self-renouncing language of the great Apostle, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' Oh! ye, who preside over the household of God, learn of the Apostle Paul to manifest your real superiority. Surpass your inferiors in humility, in charity, in zeal, in your painful labours for the salvation of sinners, in your invincible courage to encounter those dangers which threaten your brethren, and by your unwearied patience in bearing those persecutions which the faithful disciples of Christ are perpetually called to endure from a corrupt world. Thus shall you honourably replace the first Christian prelates, and happily restore the Church to its primitive dignity."

Writing sermons, and reading or delivering them.—"He, who spake as never man spake, rejected the arts of our modern orators, delivering His discourses in a style of easy simplicity, and unaffected zeal. We do not find that St. Paul and the other Apostles imposed upon themselves the troublesome servitude of penning down their discourses. And we are well assured that, when the Seventy and the Twelve were commissioned to publish the Gospel, no directions of this nature were given in either case."

"What advantage has accrued to the Church, by renouncing the apostolic method of publishing the Gospel? We have indolence and artifice, in the place of sincerity and vigilance. Those public discourses, which were anciently the effects of conviction and zeal, are now become the weakly exercises of learning and art. '*We believe, and therefore speak*,' is an expression, that has grown entirely obsolete among modern pastors. Nothing is more common among us than to say, 'As we have sermons prepared upon a variety of subjects, we are ready to deliver them, as opportunity offers.'

"Many inconveniences arise from this method of preaching. While the physician of souls is labouring to compose a learned dissertation upon some plain passage of Scripture, he has but little leisure to visit those languishing patients, who need his immediate assistance. He thinks it sufficient to attend upon them every Sabbath-day, in the place appointed for public duty: but he recollects not, that those, to whom his counsel is peculiarly necessary, are the very persons who refuse to meet him there. His unprofitable employments at home leave him no opportunity to go in pursuit of his wandering sheep. He meets them, it is true, at stated periods, in the common fold; but it is equally true that, during every successive interval, he discovers the coldest indifference with respect to their spiritual welfare. From this unbecoming conduct of many a minister, one would naturally imagine, that the flock were rather called to seek out their indolent pastor, than that he was purposely hired to pursue every straying sheep.

"Since the orator's art has taken the place of the energy of faith, what happy effects has it produced upon the minds of men? Have we discovered more frequent conversions among us? Are formal professors more generally seized with a religious fear? Do the wicked depart from the Church, to bewail their transgressions in private; and believers to visit the mourners in their affliction? Is it not rather to be lamented that we are, at this day, equally distant from Christian charity, and primitive simplicity?

"Reading approved sermons is generally supposed to be preaching the Gospel. If this were really so, we need but look out some school-boy of tolerable capacity; and, after instructing him to read, with proper emphasis and gesture, the sermons of Tillotson, Sherlock, or Saurin, we shall have made him an excellent minister of the Word of God. But, if preaching the Gospel is to publish among sinners that repentance and salvation, which we have experienced in ourselves, it is evident that experience and sympathy are more necessary to the due performance of this work, than all the accuracy and elocution that can possibly be acquired.

"When this sacred experience and this generous sympathy began to lose their prevalence in the Church, their place was gradually supplied by the trifling substitutes of study and affectation. Carnal prudence has now for many ages solicitously endeavoured to adapt itself to the taste of the wise and the learned. But, while '*the offence of the cross*' is avoided, neither the wise nor the ignorant are effectually converted.

"In consequence of the same error, the ornaments of theatrical eloquence have been sought after, with a shameful solicitude. And what has been the fruit of so much useless toil? *Preachers*, after all, have played their part with much less applause than *comedians;* and their curious auditories are still running from the pulpit to the stage, for the purpose of hearing fables repeated with a degree of sensibility, which the messengers of truth can neither *feel*, nor *feign*."

For want of space, further extracts from Fletcher's invaluable, but neglected, book cannot be given here. Those, however, already presented deserve attention. Though written a hundred years ago, they are sadly appropriate to the state of things at the present day.

As already stated, both "La Grace et la Nature," and the "Portrait of St. Paul," were written in the French language, a strong presumptive proof that he intended to publish *both* of them in his native country. So far as the "Portrait of St. Paul" is concerned, that intention was not fulfilled.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST THREE MONTHS AFTER FLETCHER'S RETURN TO MADELEY.

1781.

FLETCHER recommenced his ministry at Madeley on Sunday, May 27, 1781.[1] During his absence of four years and a-half, religion, in his parish, had not prospered. In a letter to his hospitable friend, Charles Greenwood, at Stoke Newington, he wrote :—

"Madeley, June 12, 1781. I stayed longer at Brislington than I designed. Mr. Ireland was ill, and would nevertheless come hither with me; so that I was obliged to stay till he was better. And, indeed, it was well I did not come without him; for he has helped me to regulate my outward affairs, which were in great confusion. Mr. Greaves leaves me; and I will either leave Madeley, or have an assistant able to stir among the people: for I had much rather be gone than stay here, to see the dead bury their dead. A cloud is over my poor parish; but, alas! it is not the luminous cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night. Even the few remaining professors stared at me the other day, when I preached to them on these words, 'Ye shall receive the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you.' Well, the promise is unto *us:* if others despise it, still let us believe and hope. Nothing enlarges the heart and awakens the soul more than that believing, loving expectation."[2]

The following, addressed to Wesley, refers to the same subject, and also to other matters :—

"MADELEY, *June* 6, 1781.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I rejoice to hear that your spiritual bow abides in strength. I would have wished you joy about it since my arrival, if I knew where a letter could overtake you.[3] I heartily thank you for the directions you give me to hinder my bow, so far split, from breaking quite. Now I must imitate your prudence, or the opportunity of doing it will soon be lost for good.

---

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1811, p. 312.

[2] Fletcher's "Life," by Wesley.

[3] The veteran evangelist was now visiting the Isle of Man, "east,

"I would do something in the Lord's vineyard, but I have not strength. I can hardly, without over-doing myself, visit the sick of my parish. I was better when I left Switzerland than I am now. I had a great pull back, in venturing to preach in the fields, in the Cevennes, to about two thousand French Protestants. I rode thirty miles to that place, from Montpelier, on horseback, but was obliged to be brought back in a carriage. And now that I am here, I can neither serve my church, nor get it properly served. Mr. Greaves owns, the place is not fit for him, nor he for it. He will go when I can get somebody to help me. Could you spare me Brother Bayley?[1] It would be a charity. Unless I can get a curate zealous enough to stir among the people, I will give up the place: it would be little comfort to me to stay here to see the dead bury the dead. I thank God, however, for resignation to His will. As soon as I shall discern it clearly, I shall follow it; for, I trust, I have learned in what state soever I am, therewith to be content.

"What a blessing is Christ to the soul, and health to the body! When you go to, or come from the Conference, be so good as to remember that you have now a pilgrim's house in the way from Shrewsbury to Broseley; and do not climb our hills without baiting. At our first interview, I shall ask your thoughts about a French work or two I have upon the anvil; but which I fear I shall not have time to finish. Be that as it will, God needs not the hand of Uzzah, nor my finger, to keep up His ark.

"I read, with pleasure and edification, your *Arminian Magazine*.[2] Your storehouse is inexhaustible. The Lord strengthen you to *Nestor's*

---

south, north, and west," and said, "I was thoroughly convinced that we have no such circuit as this, either in England, Scotland, or Ireland." (Wesley's Journal.)

[1] The Rev. Cornelius Bayley, at this time one of the Masters of Wesley's School at Kingswood. Cornelius Bailey was born near Whitchurch, in Shropshire, about the year 1752. He was an excellent Hebrew scholar, and published a Hebrew grammar, which procured him a doctor's degree from a foreign university. Afterwards, when he took the same degree, D.D., at Cambridge, he delivered a Latin sermon, which was much applauded. As will soon be seen, he became Fletcher's curate. On leaving Madeley, he went to Manchester, where he became the founder and the minister of St. James's Church. This is not the place to give a detailed account of this remarkable man. Suffice it to say, he died, in Manchester, on April 2, 1812, his last words being, "O my Saviour! The Lord is with me!" His remains were interred in a vault of his own church; more than forty clergymen attended his funeral; the church was crowded, and more than a thousand of his friends had to stand outside. The Rev. John Crosse, afterwards so well-known in Bradford, preached the funeral sermon. (*Christian Observer*, 1812, p. 477.)

[2] Wesley began to publish this magazine during Fletcher's absence on the continent.

years, or rather to the useful length of St. John's life! It is worth living to serve the Church, and to teach Christians to love one another.

"I am, rev. and dear Sir, your affectionate, though unprofitable servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Wesley's approaching Conference was to be held at Leeds, and to Joseph Benson, who had recently been married, Fletcher wrote as follows:—

"I am, at present, without an assistant here, but hope soon to have Mr. Bayley, one of the masters of Kingswood School. If he come, I shall be at liberty to go to Leeds, and I hope God will strengthen me for the journey. A godly wife is a peculiar blessing from the Lord. I wish you joy for such a loan. Possess it with godly fear and holy joy; and the God who gave her you help you both to see your doubled piety take root in the heart of the child that crowns your union. So prays, my dear brother, your affectionate friend,

"J. FLETCHER."[2]

Meanwhile, Fletcher had begun a correspondence with a lady hitherto unknown to him; or rather she had begun a correspondence with him. Miss Ann Loxdale, daughter of Joseph Loxdale, Esq., of Shrewsbury, was now about twenty-six years of age. Two years before the date of her letter to Fletcher, she had been converted. In reply to her communication, he said:—

"MADELEY, *May* 24, 1781.

"DEAR MADAM,—I embrace the first opportunity of thanking my unknown *friend* for her kind Christian letter. As I believe you are sincere, and mean what your pen has traced upon paper, I may rejoice over a greater treasure than that of the Indies—I mean, the *treasure of a Christian friend;* for nothing but Christianity could give you courage to express any degree of friendship for so contemptible a neighbour. I shall preach here next Sunday, please God. If you can, and if you are not afraid of dining upon a bit of cold meat, come and dine with your new and yet *old friend*, who, though he cannot converse long with his friends, on account of his weakness, will find a quarter of an hour to assure you, that, in the faith, hope, and love of the Gospel, he is,

"Madam, your obliged friend and obedient servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[3]

There cannot be a doubt respecting Miss Loxdale's ardent piety; but she was in danger of falling into some of the errors of the mystics. She had written to Wesley, asking his advice respecting the works of Madam Bourignon, which she had been reading. Wesley, in his reply, dated "June 10, 1781," told her that Madam Bourignon's "new and peculiar expressions" were "only shadows," not "an excellence, but a capital defect." Wesley continued,—

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1782, p. 48.

[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

[3] *Methodist Magazine*, 1811, p. 312.

> "As I apprehend your mind must be a little confused by reading those uncommon treatises, I wish you would give another deliberate reading to the 'Plain Account of Christian Perfection.' You may be assured there is no religion under heaven higher or deeper than that which is there described. I desire nothing, I will accept of nothing, but the common faith and common salvation; and I want you to be only just such a common Christian as Jenny Cooper was."[1]

Meantime, Miss Loxdale and Fletcher had met and conversed with each other; for, in a long letter to her, dated twelve days after Wesley's, he gave her what he considered suitable advice, and said, "I never doubted your sincerity, my dear friend; and can, without wavering, confess you *a member of my Lord, a child of my heavenly Father, and a fellow-heir of the kingdom of heaven*, purchased for penitent believers."[2]

This epistolary and *vivâ voce* intercourse grew into a sincere friendship, but nothing more than that. Miss Loxdale became one of the most holy and devoted Methodists of the last century; and, in 1811, at the age of fifty-six, married the Rev. Dr. Coke. A year afterwards, she died at York, and was buried in Dr. Coke's family vault at Brecon.[3]

Just at the time when Fletcher was writing his letters to Miss Loxdale, and giving her, most sincerely, the best advice he could, his heart was full of Miss Bosanquet, and, as will soon be seen, at the beginning of the month of June, he proposed to marry her. The reply was not unfavourable, and Fletcher at once decided to attend Wesley's Conference at Leeds, in the neighbourhood of which Miss Bosanquet resided. The following letter, addressed to Wesley, announces this decision, and refers to the case of Miss Loxdale, and to an interesting incident in Switzerland :—

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xiii., p. 121.
[2] *Methodist Magazine*, 1811, p. 312.
[3] Drew's "Life of Coke," p. 346.

"MADELEY, *Juue* 24, 1781.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—As to Miss Loxdale, I believe her to be a simple, holy follower of the Lord. Nothing throws *unscriptural* mysticism down like holding out the promise of the Father, and the fulness of the Spirit, to be received *now*, *by faith* in the two Promisers, the *Father* and the *Son*. Ah ! what is the *penal fire* of the mystics, to the *burning love* of the *Spirit*, revealing the glorious power of the *Father* and the *Son*, according to John xiv. 26, and filling us with all the fulness of God? Plain Scripture is better than all mystic refinements.

"When I was at Nyon, near Geneva, three ministers received the Word, and preached the Truth. When persecution arose because of the Word, the two pastors were afraid; but the curate of the first pastor, a burgess of the town, stood by me. This Timothy opened his house, when the pastors shut both their pulpits and houses; and I heard him preach a discourse before I came away, worthy of *you*, Sir, upon the heights and depths of holiness. He wrote an apology for me, which I sent to the head of the persecuting Clergy, and so stopped the torrent of wrath. He made observations upon the mischief done to Christianity by bad Clergy, such as George Fox and you, Sir, would not disown. When I told him of you and the Methodists, he expressed a great desire to come to England, to hear you, to see the English brethren, and to learn the English language, that he might read your works, and, perhaps, translate some of them. He can have no living in his own country, because he will not *swear to prosecute all who propagate Arminian tenets*; which is more honest than many of the Clergy, many of whom are *Arians*, *Socinians*, or *Deists*, and do not scruple to take the *Calvinian Oaths*.

"I shall endeavour to wait upon you at Leeds, at the time of the Conference: in the meantime, I am, Rev. and dear Sir, your obedient Servant, and affectionate Son in the Gospel.

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

Another of Fletcher's letters, belonging to this period, is too valuable to be omitted. His interview with Thomas Rankin, at Brislington, has been related. He now wrote to Rankin, as follows :—

"MADELEY, *June* 25, 1781.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I thank you for your kind letter to me. I found myself of *one heart* with you, both as a preacher and believer, before I left Bristol, and I am glad you find freedom to speak to me as your friend in Christ.

---

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, 1782, p. 49.

"By what you mention of your experience, I am confirmed in the thought, 1. That it is often harder to keep in the way of faith and light than to get into it. 2. That speculation and reasoning hinder us to get into that way, and lead us out of it when we are in it. 3. The only business of those who come to God, as a Redeemer or Sanctifier, must be to feel their want of redemption and sanctifying 'power from on high,' and to come for it by simple, cordial, working faith. Easily, the heart gets into a false rest before our last enemy is overcome. Hence arises a relapsing, in an imperceptible degree, into indolence and carnal security; hence a dreaming that we are rich and increased in goods.

"This is one of the causes of the declension you perceive among some of the Methodists. Another is the *outward rest* they have. Another may be the judging of the greatness of the work by the numbers in Society. Be the consequence what it will, those who see the evil should honestly bear their testimony against it, first in their own souls, next by their life, and thirdly by their plain and constant reproofs and exhortations.

"The work of justification seems stopped, in some degree, because the glory and necessity of the pardon of sins, to be *received* and *enjoyed now by faith*, is not pressed enough upon *sinners;* and the need of *retaining it* upon *believers*. The work of sanctification is hindered, if I am not mistaken, by the same reason, and by holding out the being *delivered from sin* as the mark to be aimed at, instead of being *rooted in Christ*, and *filled with the fulness of God*, and with *power from on high*. The dispensation of the Spirit is confounded with that of the Son, and the former not being held forth clearly enough, formal and lukewarm believers in Jesus Christ suppose they have the gift of the Holy Ghost. Hence the increase of *carnal* professors, see Acts viii. 16. And hence so few *spiritual* men.

"Let us pray, hope, love, believe for ourselves, and call for the display of the Lord's arm. My love to your dear fellow-labourer, Mr. Pawson. Pray for your affectionate brother,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

The sentiments expressed in this valuable letter were important a hundred years ago; and are far more important now. Methodists, and especially Methodist Preachers, ought to lay them seriously to heart. Holding them, Fletcher proceeded to the Methodist Conference of 1781, which began at Leeds on Tuesday, August 7, and concerning which Wesley writes as follows:—

"1781. Sunday, *August* 5. At the old church in Leeds, we had eighteen clergymen, and about eleven hundred communicants. I preached there at three; the church was thoroughly filled; and I believe most could hear, while I explained the 'new covenant' which God has now made with the Israel of God.

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

"Monday, 6th. I desired Mr. Fletcher, Dr. Coke, and four more of our brethren, to meet every evening, that we might consult together on any difficulty that occurred. On *Tuesday* our Conference began, at which were present about seventy preachers, whom I had severally invited to come and assist me with their advice, in carrying on the great work of God. *Wednesday*, 8th. I desired Mr. Fletcher to preach. I do not wonder he should be so popular; not only because he preaches with all his might, but because the power of God attends both his preaching and prayer. On *Monday* and *Tuesday* (August 13 and 14) we finished the remaining business of the Conference, and ended it with solemn prayer and thanksgiving."[1]

Notwithstanding the evils even then existing, and which were lamented by Fletcher in the foregoing letter, these were glorious days, and their conferences memorable "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Mr. Gorham, of St. Neots, was at the Conference of 1781, and wrote:—

"Mr. Fletcher preached at five in the morning, from 2 Peter i. 4. Notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, at least two thousand persons were present, who appeared to listen to him with the deepest attention."

Joseph Pescod, one of Wesley's itinerant preachers, in a letter to his wife, remarked:—

"I arrived at Leeds on Saturday evening; and on Sunday morning, at five o'clock, I had the happiness to hear that venerable servant of God, Mr. Fletcher. Never did I see any man more like what I suppose the ancient Apostles to have been. His text was 2 Peter i. 4: 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.' He spoke particularly of the three great promises of God to man. The leading promise of the Old Testament, he remarked, was, 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.' On this promise, he observed, the saints lived four thousand years, and were saved through the Messiah to come. The other two, he said, were New Testament promises. First, the promise of the Holy Ghost, whom our Lord told His disciples He would send after His ascension. The dispensation of the Spirit is to renew us after the image of God; which implies light, and power, and love. The third promise, on which he dwelt, was that of the resurrection of the body. I think I never heard a sermon to be compared with it. I wish I could tell you every word. I had, also, the happiness to receive from his hand the bread in the sacrament of the Lord's

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

Supper. The ordinance was administered in the old church, by Mr. Wesley, Mr. Fletcher, and nine other clergymen. Mr. Wesley preached in the afternoon, in the church, from Hebrews viii. 10-12."[1]

Wesley's Conference finished its business on August 14; but Fletcher, the happy guest of Miss Bosanquet, at Cross Hall, continued in the neighbourhood about three weeks longer, "preaching," says his delighted hostess, "in different places, with much power."[2] A record of one of the meetings that Fletcher attended fortunately exists, and is here given almost without abridgment.

James Rogers was, at this time, stationed at Sheffield; but, no doubt, both he and his far-famed wife, "Hester Ann," attended the Conference at Leeds. After its sittings were ended, she, like Fletcher, still remained. On August 24, Fletcher came with Miss Bosanquet, and Mrs. Crosby, to dine at Mr. Smith's, in Park Row, and to meet the Select Society. Mrs. Rogers writes:—

"When I entered the room, where they were assembled, the heavenly man was giving out the following verses, with such animation as I have seldom witnessed—

"'Near us, assisting Jesus, stand;
Give us the op'ning heavens to see;
Thee to behold at God's right hand,
And yield our parting souls to Thee.

"'My Father, O my Father, hear,
And send the fiery chariot down;
Let Israel's flaming steeds appear,
And whirl us to the starry crown.

"'We, we would die for Jesus too;
Through tortures, fires, and seas of blood,
All triumphantly break through,
And plunge into the depths of God.'

"After this, Mr. Fletcher poured out his full soul in prayer to God. Indeed, his every breath seemed to be prayer, or praise, or spiritual instruction; and every word that fell from his lips appeared to be accompanied by unction from above.

"After dinner, I took an opportunity to beg him to explain an expression he had used in a letter to Miss Loxdale;[1] namely, that, on all who are renewed in love, God bestows the gift of prophecy. He called for the Bible; then read and explained Acts ii.; observing, that, to prophesy in the sense *he* meant, was, to magnify God with the *new heart* of love, and the *new tongue* of praise, as they did, who, on the day of Pentecost, were filled with the Holy Ghost. He insisted that believers now are called upon to prove the same baptismal fire; that the day of Pentecost was the opening of the dispensation of the Spirit,—the great promise of the Father; and that the *latter day glory*, which he believed was near at hand, should far exceed the first effusion of the Spirit. Seeing then that they, on the day of Pentecost, bore witness to the grace of our Lord, so should *we;* and, like them, spread the flame of love.

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1829, p. 528.
[2] Moore's "Life of Mrs. Fletcher," p. 141.

"After singing a hymn, he cried, 'O to be filled with the Holy Ghost! I want to be filled! O, my friends, let us wrestle for a more abundant outpouring of the Spirit!' To me, he said, 'Come, my sister, will *you* covenant with me this day, to pray for *the fulness of the Spirit?* Will *you* be a witness for Jesus?' I answered, with flowing tears, 'In the strength of Jesus I will.' He cried, 'Glory, glory be to God! Lord, strengthen Thy handmaid to keep this covenant, even unto death!'

"He then said, 'My dear brethren and sisters, God is here! I feel Him in this place; but I would hide my face in the dust, because I have been ashamed to declare what He has done for *me*. For many years, I have grieved His Spirit; I am deeply humbled; and He has again restored my soul.' Last Wednesday evening, He spoke to me by these words, '*Reckon yourselves, therefore, to be dead indeed unto sin; but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*' I obeyed the voice of God: I now obey it; and tell you all, to the praise of His love,—*I am freed from sin.* Yes, I rejoice to declare it, and to be a witness to the glory of His grace, that *I am dead unto sin, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ*, who is my Lord and King! I received this blessing four or five times before; but I lost it, by not observing the order of God; who has told us, *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* But the enemy offered his bait, under various colours, to keep me from a public declaration of what God had wrought.'

"'When I first received this grace, Satan bid me wait awhile, till I saw more of the *fruits:* I resolved to do so; but I soon began to doubt of the *witness*, which, before, I had felt in my heart; and, in a little time, I was sensible I had lost both. A second time, after receiving this salvation, I was kept from being a witness for my Lord, by the suggestion, 'Thou art a public character—the eyes of *all* are upon thee—and if, as before, by *any* means thou lose the blessing, it will be a dishonour to the doctrine of *heart-holiness*.' I held my peace, and again forfeited the gift of God. At another time, I was prevailed upon to hide it, by reasoning, 'How few, even of the *children of God*, will receive this testimony; many of them supposing every transgression of the Adamic law is sin; and, therefore, if I profess to be *free* from sin, *all* these will give my profession the lie; because I am *not* free in *their* sense: I am not free from ignorance, mistakes, and various infirmities; I will, therefore, enjoy what God has wrought in me; but I will not say, *I am perfect in love.* Alas! I soon found again, *He that hideth his Lord's talent, and improveth it not, from that unprofitable servant shall be taken away even that he hath.*

---

[1] The letter already referred to, and dated June 22, 1781. See it in *Methodist Magazine*, 1811, p. 312.

"'Now, my brethren, you see my folly. I have confessed it in your presence; and *now* I resolve before you all to confess my Master. I will confess Him to all the world. And I declare unto you, in the presence of God, the Holy Trinity, I am now *dead indeed unto sin.* I do not say, *I am crucified with Christ,* because some of our well-meaning brethren say, by *this* can only be meant *a gradual dying;* but I profess unto you, *I am dead unto sin, and alive unto God:* and, remember, all this is *through Jesus Christ our Lord. He* is my Prophet, Priest, and King—my indwelling Holiness—my *all in all.* I wait for the fulfilment of that prayer, *That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: and that they may be one, even as we are one.* O for that pure baptismal flame! O for the fulness of the dispensation of the Holy Ghost! Pray, pray, pray for this! This shall make us all of one heart, and of one soul. Pray for *gifts*—for the gift of utterance; and confess your royal Master. A man without gifts is like a king in disguise: he appears as a subject only. You are *kings and priests unto God!* Put on, therefore, your robes, and wear on your *garter, holiness to the Lord.*'

"A few days after this, I heard Mr. Fletcher preach upon the same subject; inviting all, who felt their need of full redemption, to believe *now* for this great salvation. He observed, 'As when you reckon with your creditor, or with your host, and, as when you have paid all, you reckon yourselves free, so now reckon with God. *Jesus* has paid all: He has paid for *thee!*—has purchased *thy pardon* and *holiness;* therefore, it is now God's command, *Reckon thyself dead indeed unto sin;* and thou art alive unto God from this hour! O, begin, begin to reckon now! Fear not: believe, believe, believe! and continue to believe every moment! So shalt thou continue *free;* for it is retained, as it is received, by *faith alone.* And, whosoever thou art that perseveringly believeth, it will be as fire in thy bosom, and constrain thee to confess with thy mouth *thy Lord and King, Jesus.* And, in spreading the sacred flame of love, thou shalt be saved to the uttermost.'

"He also dwelt largely on those words, 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.' He asked, 'How did sin abound? Had it not overpowered your whole soul? Were not all your passions, tempers, propensities, and affections, inordinate and evil? Did not pride, anger, self-will, and unbelief, all reign over you? And, when the Spirit of God strove with you, did you not repel all His convictions, and put Him far from you? Well, my brethren, ye were *then* the servants of sin, and were free from righteousness; but now, being made free from sin, ye become servants to God; and holiness shall overspread your whole soul, so that all your tempers and passions shall be henceforth regulated and governed by Him who now sitteth upon the throne of your heart, making all things new. As you once resisted the Holy Spirit, so now you shall have power to resist all the subtle frauds or fierce attacks of Satan.'

"Mr. Fletcher then, with lifted hands, cried, 'Who will thus be saved? Who will believe the report? You are only in an improper sense called believers who reject this. Who is a believer? One who believes a few things which his God has spoken? Nay, but one who believes all that ever proceeded out of His mouth. Here then is the word of the Lord: *As sin abounded, grace shall much more abound!* As no *good thing* was in you by nature, so now no *evil thing* shall remain. Do you believe this? Or are you a *half* believer only? Come! Jesus is offered to thee as a *perfect Saviour*. Take Him, and He will make thee a *perfect saint*. O ye *half* believers, will you still plead for the murderers of your Lord? Which of these will you hide as a serpent in your bosom? Shall it be anger, pride, self-will, or *accursed* unbelief? O be no longer befooled! Bring these enemies to thy Lord, and let Him slay them.'"[1]

Mrs. Rogers was not a shorthand writer. She wrote from memory; and though what she relates in the foregoing extracts is, no doubt, *substantially* correct, yet Fletcher must not be held accountable for *every word* she uses. The narrative, however, is very valuable, because it exhibits Fletcher at a most important epoch of his life, and exhibits him in his free-and-easy religious dishabille among his friends. Wesley says:—

"There is a peculiar difficulty in giving a full account of either the life or character of Mr. Fletcher, because we have scarce any light from himself. He was upon all occasions very uncommonly reserved in speaking of himself, whether in writing or conversation. He hardly ever said anything concerning himself, unless it slipped from him unawares. And, among the great number of papers which he has left, there is scarce a page (except the account of his conversion to God), relative either to his own inward experience, or the transactions of his life. So that the most of the information we have is gathered up, either from short hints scattered up and down in his letters, from what he had occasionally dropped among his friends, or from what one and another remembered concerning him.

"This defect was indeed, in some measure, supplied by the entire intimacy which subsisted between him and Mrs. Fletcher. He did not willingly, much less designedly, conceal anything from her. They had no secrets with regard to each other, but had indeed one house, one purse, and one heart. Before her, it was his invariable rule to *think aloud;* always to open the window in his breast. And to this we are indebted for the knowledge of many particulars which must otherwise have been buried in oblivion."[1]

---

[1] Dr. Coke's funeral sermon on the death of Mrs. H. A. Rogers, 1795; and "Experience and Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers."

No doubt this statement is perfectly accurate. Fletcher, like Wesley himself, was never a talkative religious professor; and the outpourings of his heart, related by Hester Ann Rogers, may be regarded as exceptional.

Nothing more need be added to the present chapter except the incident that, both in going to Leeds and returning to Madeley, Fletcher preached at Sheffield, where the husband of Hester Ann Rogers was at that time Wesley's "Assistant." He was the guest of Mr. Thomas Holy. The following is taken from an unpublished memoir of Mr. Holy, written by the late Rev. James Everett :—

"The sainted Fletcher was twice an inmate of Mr. Holy's house. This extraordinary man preached twice in Norfolk Street chapel, on going to and returning from the Conference at Leeds, in 1781. One of of his texts was, 'The kingdom of God is within you;' and the other, 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.' On both occasions, the chapel was crowded, and several clergymen were present. When he was introduced to Mr. Holy, his salutation was, 'Peace be to thee, my brother;' and, on crossing Mr. Holy's threshold, he said, 'Peace be to this house.' Mrs. Brammah, the widow of an old itinerant preacher, and one of Mr. Holy's pensioners, was present, and observed that Mr. Fletcher frequently repeated the latter text, as if desirous to impress the company with its importance and its blessedness. 'Mr. Fletcher's conversation,' remarked Mr. Holy, 'was always instructive and impressive; and I felt while I was with him as if I were in the presence of a superior being.' During his stay in Sheffield, Mr. Fletcher bathed every morning in a river, about half a mile distant from Mr. Holy's residence. His host always accompanied him, and was much struck with his excellent swimming."

This is a trivial matter, but trifles concerning "mighty men, men of renown," are worth preserving.

A journey from Madeley to Leeds, a hundred years ago, was a somewhat serious affair. In an unpublished letter, addressed to Mr. Ireland, Fletcher tells his friend that the journey occupied two days and a half, and that his new saddle was so hard that, to save himself from suffering, he was obliged to put the hair-skins, used for the protection of his chest, into his "breeches." In the same letter, he gives an account of the suicide of his "atheistical nephew;" and concludes as follows:—

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."

> "If Mr. Romaine be still with you, please to remember me in much love to him. I went yesterday to Salop, saw Mr. De Courcy,[1] and invited Mr. Rowland Hill to preach here to cement love."

---

[1] At that time the incumbent of the parish of St. Alkmond, Shrewsbury. ("Life of Rev. R. Hill," by Sidney, p. 137.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLETCHER'S MARRIAGE.

1781.

FLETCHER spent a happy month among the "elect" ladies of Methodism in the North of England; to wit, Miss Bosanquet, Hester Ann Rogers, Sarah Crosby, and their friends; and, on his return to Madeley, he had to correspond with two others in the south, Miss Perronet and Lady Mary Fitzgerald. To the former he wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *September* 4, 1781.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—You want 'some *thoughts* on the love of God;' and I want the warmest *feelings* of it. Let us believe His creating, feel His preserving, admire His redeeming, and triumph in His sanctifying love. *Loving* is the best way to grow in love. Let us then look at the love of our heavenly Father, shining in the face of our elder Brother, and we shall be changed into love—His image and nature—from one *glorious* and *glorifying* degree of *love* to another. Love always delights in the object loved. 'Delight thou in the Lord,' then, and 'thou shalt have thy heart's desire;' for we can desire nothing more than the *supreme good* and *infinite bliss;* both are in God. When, therefore, we love God truly, we *delight* in what *He is;* we share in His infinite happiness; and, by divine sympathy, His throne of glory becomes *ours;* for true love rejoices in all the joy of the object to which it cleaves.

"Add to this, that when we love God we have always our hearts' desire; for we love *His will,* His desires become ours, and ours are always perfectly resigned to His. Now as God does whatsoever He pleases, both in heaven and earth, His lovers have always their hearts' desire, forasmuch as they always have *His will,* which is theirs. Submitting our private will to His is only preferring a greater good to a less, and we are called to do it in afflictions.

"Farewell, my dear friend, and excuse these reflections, which you could make much better than your humble servant,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 277.

An excellent love-letter, from one who was now the declared lover of Mary Bosanquet.

Lady Mary Fitzgerald wished to visit Fletcher at Madeley, and to her he wrote the following :—

"MADELEY, *September* 3, 1781.

"MY MUCH-HONOURED LADY,—Two days ago I came here, after an absence of above a month; and yesterday I received your letter, without date, which has been, I am told, waiting here some time.

"What a pity I did not rejoice sooner in the good news you send me, —that you desire to be *entirely* devoted to God. Indeed, complaints follow; but *heaven* is in that holy desire. If you cultivate it, it will produce all that conformity to a holy God, which love can bring to a human soul. As for your complaints, they are the natural expressions of that repentance which precedes the coming of the Comforter, who is to abide with us for ever. I am ready to rejoice, or to mourn with my honoured friend; and I have abundant cause to do both with respect to myself, my ministrations, the Church, and my people.

"And will you, indeed, find it in your heart to honour my house with your presence, and perfume also with your prayers the plain apartment occupied by your friend Johnson?[1] I wonder at nothing on earth, when I consider the condescension with which Emmanuel came down from heaven and filled a stable with His glory. Your time, my condescending friend, will suit me best. You will be queen in my hermitage; the Lord will rule in our hearts; and you will command, under Him, within our walls. You smile, perhaps, at the vastness of your new empire; but if you can be content and happy in God in my homely solitude, you will make greater advances towards bliss than if you obtained the Principality of Wales. But if you cannot be happy with Jesus, prayer, praise, godly conversation, and retirement, expect a disappointment. However, my honoured friend, if you come, come as the serious Catholics go on a pilgrimage, as French noblemen go to the Carthusian Convent at La Trappe, as the French king's aunts went to the Carmelites,—come and do *evangelical penance*. Our good friend Johnson will tell you of an upper room where we crucify our old man, and have had many a visit from the new. If you do not bring her with you, bring her faith, which brought Him down, and then you shall not pine for the company of earthly princes. The Prince of Peace Himself will keep His court in our cottage, and your heart shall be one of His favourite thrones."[2]

From these Christian ladies, the reader's attention must now be directed to another.

---

[1] Probably Ann Johnson, who was a member of the Methodist Society in London sixty years; a class-leader, thirty-seven; who died at the age of eighty in 1828, and whose remains were interred in the burial-ground of City Road Chapel. See Stevenson's "City Road Chapel," p. 458.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 276.

Mary Bosanquet, oddly enough, was born in the same month, and on the same day of the month, as Fletcher; but there was this difference—she was ten years younger than he. Her birth took place in 1739, the year in which Methodism was cradled. Her father was "one of the chief merchants in London,"[1] and "lord of the manor of Leytonstone, in Essex."[2] The place of her nativity was Forest House, a fine old mansion, three stories high, still standing in its own beautiful and spacious grounds, about a mile from Leyton, and still owned by a member of the Bosanquet family (S. R. Bosanquet, Esq.), who has recently given a plot of ground in the main street of the town on which to build the "Mary Fletcher Memorial Chapel."

By means of a Methodist servant, Mary Bosanquet found peace with God, through faith in Jesus Christ, when she was only eight years old. At the age of thirteen, she became acquainted with Mrs. Lefevre, whose admirable "Letters on Religious Subjects" used to be one of the favourite books of the early Methodists; and concerning which Wesley himself testified: "The 'Letters' are patterns of truly polite epistolary correspondence; expressing the noblest sentiments in the most elegant manner, in the purest, yea, and finest language."[3] At the house of Mrs. Lefevre, Miss Bosanquet was introduced to a number of godly people, many of them Methodists. When fourteen years of age, she was confirmed in St. Paul's Cathedral, and began to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Soon after this, her father and mother thought her "righteous over much," and great uneasiness, on both sides, followed. The parents were members of the Church of England; but, like many other professedly Christian people, they loved gaiety and worldly pleasure. Their daughter grieved them, because she attired herself plainly, and objected to go to balls and theatres. In the midst of this unpleasantness, she became acquainted with Sarah Ryan and Sarah Crosby, and, at their humble dwelling, in Christopher Alley,

---

[1] "Life of Rev. H. Venn," p. 376.
[2] "Sermon on the death of Mrs. Fletcher," by John Hodson, p. 47.
[3] Preface to the Letters.

Moorfields, was accustomed to meet companies of the Old Foundery Methodists. Meanwhile, the unhappiness at home increased.

At the age of twenty-one, Miss Bosanquet came into possession of "a small fortune;" and, for her own comfort and that of her family, she left the parental home, and rented two unfurnished rooms in the house of Mrs. Gold, in Hoxton Square. She "hired a sober girl;" her mother gave her two beds; and she was driven to her lodgings in her father's coach. She reached her new home about eight o'clock at night. She had no candle. The people of the house she had never seen. She borrowed a table; and the window seat served her as a chair. Her supper consisted of bread, "rank salt butter, and water;" but she says, she "could truly say, '*I eat my meat with gladness and singleness of heart.*' The bedstead was not, as yet, put up, and, therefore, she laid upon the floor; "and the windows" of the bedless bedroom "having no shutters, and it being a bright moonlight night," she remarks, "the sweet solemnity thereof well agreed with the tranquillity of my spirit.

Her "maid was dull and ignorant, though good;" and she herself "knew little more of the world than" did her maid, "having been used to so different a way of life." Just at this juncture, ill-health obliged Sarah Ryan to leave Wesley's meeting-house in Bristol, and to return to London, where she lodged with her sister. Here her illness became serious; and Miss Bosanquet served, as her nurse, "night and day." "After a time," writes Miss Bosanquet, "the Lord was pleased to restore her to health; and, having one heart, one mind, and one purse, we agreed that one habitation also would be most profitable;" and, accordingly, the two now resided together at Hoxton.

On March 24, 1763, Miss Bosanquet and Sarah Ryan removed from Hoxton to Leytonstone, and occupied a house belonging to the former. Miss Bosanquet told her father that she intended to have Methodist preaching in her house; her father made no objection, but remarked, "If a mob should pull your house about your ears, I cannot hinder them." She and Sarah Ryan began to hold meetings, on Thursday nights, at which they "read a chapter, and sometimes spoke from it." They also gathered a Methodist class, of twenty-five members; and, in due time, Wesley sent his Itinerant, John Murlin, to preach to them. Thus began Methodism at Leytonstone. "Sometimes on Sundays, when the nights were dark, a mob would collect at the gate" of Miss Bosanquet's domestic cathedral, "and throw dirt at the people as they went out; after which, they used to come into the yard, and, putting their faces to a window, which was without shutters, would roar and howl like wild beasts."

At the first, Miss Bosanquet's family at Leytonstone consisted of herself, her maid, Sarah Ryan, and "Sally Lawrence,[1] a child about four years old, whom" she had "taken from the side of her mother's coffin." In a little while, five other orphans were admitted; and it became necessary to employ Ann Tripp[2] to serve as their governess. Miss Bosanquet writes: "Some serious women also were added to our household, and each had their duties and employments assigned them. In the whole, we received thirty-five children, and thirty-four grown persons, but not all at one time." Thus did Miss Bosanquet turn her dwelling into a chapel, an orphanage, and a poor-house. All in the house, herself included, wore the same kind of dress, made of "a dark purple cotton;" and all dined at the same table, which was "five yards long," and stood in the hall. Here also they all assembled "for morning and evening devotion, and on several other occasions."

Miss Bosanquet soon found that her family was larger than her income could maintain; but even this did not discourage her, as she was at perfect liberty to spend her capital.

Most of the children when admitted to her house "were naked, full of vermin, and some of them were afflicted with disagreeable distempers. The first thing was to clean and clothe them, and attend to their health ; which usually was followed with much success."

---

[1] Sarah Lawrence was the niece of Sarah Ryan. She lived with her benefactress until her death, which occurred at Madeley, on December 3, 1800. Like Mrs. Fletcher, for several years, she was a *preacheress*, and very useful.

[2] Ann Tripp was converted under the ministry of Wesley and Thomas Maxfield. After the marriage of Miss Bosanquet and her removal to Madeley, she settled at Leeds, and, at the time of her death, in 1823, was one of the oldest leaders of the Leeds Society. (*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1823, p. 706.)

> "The eldest of the children arose between four and five ; the younger not much later. At half-an-hour after six," says Miss Bosanquet, "we had family prayer ; at seven, we breakfasted together on herb tea, or milk porridge. The small children then went into the garden till eight. At eight, the bell rang for school, which continued till twelve. Then, after a few minutes spent in prayer, the children came down to us, when we either walked out with them, or, if the weather did not permit, we found them some employment in the house, endeavouring, at the same time, to give them both instruction and recreation. At one, we dined ; about two, the bell rang again for school ; and, at five, they returned to us, and were employed as before till supper time. Then, after family prayer, they were washed, and were put to bed at eight. Four or five of the bigger girls were each week kept out of the school, by turns, and employed in house-work, cooking, etc., that they might be accustomed to every sort of business ; and there was work enough in so large a family. Several of the children were very young, though I do not remember we had any under two years, except one of about a month old, which was laid, very neatly dressed, one night late at our door ; but it lived only a fortnight, being full of humours, probably derived from its parents.
>
> "We had, I think, never more than ten grown persons in the family at one time, who were not invalids ; nor do I remember above five or six altogether in health. The children also, for the first few years, suffered under various disorders ; for we did not refuse either old or young, on account of their being sick or helpless."

Miss Bosanquet, as might be expected, was soon involved in pecuniary embarrassments. Just about this period, a young lady of fortune, Miss Lewen, came to board and lodge with her, and also brought two children of whom she had taken charge. After residing about half a year in this unique retreat at Leytonstone,—chapel, orphanage, school, poor-house, and infirmary all combined in one,—Miss Lewen wished to make a new will, and to bequeath her hostess "a large sum of money." Miss Bosanquet objected, because Miss Lewen had already "left the bulk of her estate (which was large) to charitable uses." In 1766, Miss Lewen became suddenly very ill ; and, one night, while some of the inmates of the house were watching at her side, she cried, "Give me pen and paper ; I cannot die easy, unless I write something of my mind concerning Sister Bosanquet having £2,000.

Pen and paper were supplied, and the writing was written; but, of course, it was illegal and worthless. Miss Lewen died; but Miss Bosanquet, instead of receiving the £2,000, which Miss Lewen wished her to have, received not a farthing, and was considerably out of pocket on her dead friend's account.

About the beginning of 1765, Miss Bosanquet's father died; and nine months afterwards her mother. By his will, her father bequeathed her £4,500, to be invested by her trustees for her benefit; and, when she married with their approval and consent, this amount of money was to be transferred to herself, and to be absolutely at her own disposal.[1]

From a letter, written by S. Bosanquet, Esq., and dated "Forest House, October 15, 1781," it appears that Miss Bosanquet had altogether a fortune of not less than £10,500,—a large sum, when it is remembered that money then was about three or four times the value of money now. Mr. Bosanquet's letter was addressed to his sister, and in it he says:—

	£
"You had Leytonstone estate, valued at	3,000
You had from my grandmother	2,500
You had the savings of Leyton estate till you came of age .	500
You had by my father's will	4,500
	£10,500"[2]

With the exception of her father's bequest, the whole of this money was at her own disposal, and, at the time of her marriage, was entirely spent, not on herself, but solely on behalf of others. Added to this, she was also, to a serious amount, in debt; but more of this anon.

About three years after the death of Miss Bosanquet's father, Richard Taylor, a good and well-meaning man, "left his wife and young family" in Yorkshire, "and came to London in hope of settling with his creditors." Sarah Crosby, who was now resident in Miss Bosanquet's house, and John Murlin, one of the itinerant preachers stationed in the London Circuit, recommended Taylor, the improvident debtor, to Miss Bosanquet's notice, and, for some time, he also became a member of her motley household. This unfortunate event created a world of trouble. By her father's bequest, Miss Bosanquet's income was increased; but her income was not equal to her expenses. Added to this, Sarah Ryan's health entirely failed; and, partly on her account, and also for other reasons, Miss Bosanquet entertained the thought of removing her family to Yorkshire. Accordingly, on June 7, 1768, she and her two friends, Sarah Ryan and Sarah Crosby, set out, in a chaise, on this long and tiresome journey, Richard Taylor accompanying them on horseback. For seven weeks, they lived in the house of Taylor's father-in-law, when they procured a house for themselves at Gildersome, a village in the parish of Batley, and about four miles and a half from Leeds. At the same time (on August 17, 1768), Sarah Ryan died; and this event augmented Miss Bosanquet's anxieties, and affected her health. She writes :—

---

[1] "Probate of Mr. Bosanquet's Will."
[2] Unpublished letter.

"My health began to fail. For three years, I had had much fatigue in nursing my dear friend. I grew large, and had dropsical symptoms. My soul, also, was in a low and cold state. My path was strewed with many perplexities. My family consisted of thirty persons, some of whom were rather unruly. I saw the need of taking the reins into my own hands, and supplying the place of my friend Ryan. But this determination was very difficult to execute; and I daily and hourly felt my insufficiency. While she was alive, I considered her as a mother, and desired her to allot me my employments, as she did in the case of the young women. These were, 1. An attention to the spiritual affairs of the family. 2. Taking care for their sustenance. 3. Instructing the children. 4. Meeting each member of the family, one by one, at fixed times. 5. Superintending, by turns, the more public meetings of the Society. 6. Attending my friend in her frequent illnesses; with the direction and management of the sick. But the care of the kitchen, buying stores, managing the needlework, and many other things belonging to housekeeping, I was quite unaccustomed to. While I lived in my father's house, I saw very little of domestic affairs, because we lived rather high.

"Beside, the manner of life in Yorkshire was entirely different from what I had been used to about London. Here wheat was to be bought to be made into flour; bread to be made; cows to be managed; and men-servants to be directed. And when I had provided as well as I could, some persons in my family would despisingly say, my victuals were not worth eating, and that I knew not how to order anything. The house was large, and there was land to it; but, one day, Richard

Taylor, whom I had employed in ordering the out-door affairs, brought me word of a farm very cheap, on which were malt-kilns, a small house, and many out-buildings. The farm was large, and he thought if, besides the farm-house, we were to build one big enough for our family, it would be cheaper than to rent a house. I went to Leeds to consult the most judicious of my friends; in particular Mr. R——, a man well acquainted with business, and the most intimate friend I had in Yorkshire. He replied, 'Had you waited a dozen years, you might not have met with such an opportunity. Richard Taylor knows well how to manage, if you do not; and I have no doubt the farm will clear you £150 a year, which will be good interest for your money.

"I prayed for light, bought the estate, formed the plan for the house, and set about it. But I found building no cheaper in Yorkshire than in the south, or but little so. It cost a good deal more than was at first proposed. The farm took much money to stock it, and to bring it into order; and, as I had not sufficient for all the expenses, I was obliged to take up money on interest, which I hoped to pay off at the rate of £50 a year. The malt-kilns seemed to answer well, and cleared the first year £50, above all expenses.

"I found my mind much united to Brother and Sister Taylor. I strove to remove their burdens, and went in person to their creditors. After meeting with some opposition, I got their affairs settled, at the expense of between two and three hundred pounds.

"My perplexities increased. The farm had sunk a very large sum to bring it into order, and the kilns took much money to work them, a great deal of which lay scattered up and down in debts, owing to me from lesser maltsters. I also saw that Richard Taylor went too far; that he was inclined to venture much; that he kept too many men; and that he gave a great deal too much credit.

"I lessened my family all I could, by putting out some of the bigger children to trades, or servants' places; but much expense attended it. Richard Taylor also had several children, while with me, so that the family still consisted of twenty-five persons; the majority of whom were grown persons. Losses continually occurred. I consulted Mr. ——, and other friends about my situation; but most of them were for some further exertion in trade. That I knew would not do. Some said, 'Turn away all the members of your family: you have enough to live on alone with a servant or two;' but I could not see how that could be done, for several of them were old, sickly, or helpless. Mr. —— said, 'There is but one way for you; put the farm into the hands of Richard Taylor, entirely separate from yourself; let him have the stock just as it is, and work the kilns as he can raise the money. Let him pay you £60 a year, and take his family to the end of the house. I agreed to this, and Richard Taylor paid his rent regularly; but, as he was to have the farm free of debt, I found a good deal to pay which he had not brought to account; so that, before all was settled, I had again to take up money on interest, which was no small affliction to me. Could I have sold the place, I would have chosen it rather.

"We went on tolerably for three years. Mr. —— thought the farm increased in heart; the stock also improved, and all was cheerful, except in my own mind, which foreboded deep waters. This was soon realized. In the beginning of the fourth year, Taylor was £600 in debt. I thought, I am not obliged to pay his debt; let him break, and bear his own burden; but I soon saw that I must either give up the stock, which would be sold for half it value, or I must pay the money. Besides, I was now informed, that, when he ceased to act as my agent, I ought to have advertised it, that no one might trust him through confidence in me."

Thus, through wretched Richard Taylor, Miss Bosanquet found herself in a most serious entanglement. At the first, she felt she was not bound to pay Taylor's debt; but Taylor's wife, big with child, came to her wringing her hands, and entreating her to save her husband from being sent to prison. The result was, Miss Bosanquet paid the debt, by accepting the offer of a loan of £600 from Mr. ——, who became a partner with her in the farm and malt-kilns, and took the management of the whole. This, however, did not end her anxieties. She writes:—

"In my deep troubles, a thought occurred to my mind. 'Perhaps Mr. Fletcher is to be my deliverer;' but I started from the idea, lest it should be a stratagem of Satan. We had not seen or heard from each other for more than fifteen years. Besides, I was now (in August, 1777), told that Mr. Fletcher was dying. As I was, one day, in prayer, offering him up to the Lord, these words occurred to me,—'The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.' I thought if the Lord should raise him up, and should bring him back from Switzerland to England, and he should propose to marry me, could I doubt its being of God? I felt an unaccountable liberty to ask,—1. That Mr. Fletcher might be raised up. 2. That he might be brought back to England. 3. That he might write to me on the subject before he saw me, though we had been so many years asunder, without so much as a message passing on any subject. 4. That he might tell me, in his letter, that (marrying me) had been the subject of his thoughts and prayers for years. It also occurred to me, that, should this take place in the end of 1781, it would be a still greater confirmation, as Providence seemed to point me to that season as a time of hope."

Miss Bosanquet's troubles were continued. Her new partnership was disastrous, and Mr. ——'s management a failure. He had told her she would receive £100 a-year towards paying off the debts she owed to himself and others; but the farm, instead of yielding a profit, was worked at a loss.

The interest she had to pay so reduced her income, that it became impossible to keep more than half her family with what remained. She writes :—

> "As to the kilns, I had neither money nor courage to work them. I strove, I worked hard, I prayed; and, at length, I proposed to the members of my family to disperse, and learn some little business; and I would allow to each of them what I could. It was a most painful thing; but I saw there was no way but first to sell the place, and then disperse.
>
> "Just at this time, a gentleman proposed to buy the place, stock, lease, and everything. He was a man both of fortune and of honour, and really wished to help me out of my difficulties; and the price he offered would bring me through all, and leave me a good income. The bargain was in part made; but, alas! he took a fever, and, in a few days, died. I now saw but one way—to advertise Cross Hall, and sell it for what I could; and, paying the purchase money away as far as it would go, strive yearly to lessen the remaining part of the debt by my income, reserving only £50 per year to live on, and to help my friends. But I recollected that I might not live long enough thus to pay the debt by my income. I then proposed to myself to keep only £20 per year; nay, I thought, how can I have a right even to twenty? Justice is before mercy. One day, as I was standing at a window, musing on this subject, I saw a poor man driving asses laden with sand, by which he gained his bread. As I looked on him, I thought, I am perfectly willing to take up the business of that man. If I can preserve unsold one of the freehold cottages, the asses might graze on the common, and I could follow them with something to sell. There were but few trades which my conscience would suffer me to follow; and my abilities were equal to still fewer; but to anything in the world would I turn, that was not sinful, rather than remain in debt."
>
> "The 7th of June, 1781, was the day that began my fourteenth year in Yorkshire. I saw difficulties, as mountains, rise all around me; but the very next day, June the 8th, I received a letter from Mr. Fletcher, in which he told me, that he had, for twenty-five years, found a regard for me, which was still as sincere as ever; and, though it might appear odd that he should write on such a subject, when but just returned from abroad, and more so without seeing me first, he could only say, that his mind was so strongly drawn to do it, he believed it to be the order of Providence." [1]

Thus began Fletcher's courtship, which ended five months afterwards in his marrying Mary Bosanquet.

The foregoing is a strange story. Of set purpose, nothing has been said of Miss Bosanquet's earnest piety, gospel labours, and spiritual successes, both in the south of England and in Yorkshire. The object has been to show to what straits a young lady of fortune was brought, by injudicious generosity, by foolish advisers, and, perhaps, it may be added, by crafty mendicants. Eighteen years before this, in a letter to Charles Wesley, Fletcher confessed that he regarded Miss Bosanquet with admiration;[1] and that Miss Bosanquet regarded Fletcher with equal admiration the foregoing extracts amply prove; as does also a letter, which she addressed to Wesley, nearly six years before her marriage, and from which the following is taken:—

---

[1] These statements are partly taken from "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley. By a Gentlewoman, 1764" (Miss Bosanquet); and partly from the "Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher. By Henry Moore, 1818."

"CROSS HALL, *February* 7, 1776.

"REV. SIR,—I thank you for your kind favour of January 27. It yielded us much satisfaction; for never before could we get any account to be depended on.

"I am exceedingly thankful Mr. Fletcher is with Mrs. Greenwood. She will tenderly care for him: and, having a spiritual mind, will be sensible of the honour God does her, in giving her such an opportunity.

"How wise are all the ways of God, in keeping His faithful servant in that retired spot" (Stoke Newington), "while those precious works are completed, by which he will yet speak to us, though in glory: and now to enable him to bring them out, while his exemplary life and conversation add a lustre to the truths he has so powerfully defended.

"We could have liked to have seen him once more; but the will of the Lord be done! Should it happen that this sickness is not unto death, we shall rejoice in having an opportunity of assisting him in anything which lies in our power. Should this favour be denied us, we must be content; and beseech God to reward those who may supply our lack of service.

"The blessed account you give of the state of his mind filled my soul with sacred joy, as also those of my friends. While I was reading it, it was a solemn season of faith and love, and we could not help saying, 'Ah, Lord! Let not this shining light be so soon extinguished!'

"A few weeks ags, I once more read the '*Equal Check*,' and felt an unction in it above all I had ever found before. The '*Essay on Truth*,' with the Appendix, is as marrow and fatness to my soul. O may all the height and depth of every Gospel promise be written on his heart!"[2]

Did Fletcher ever see this loving, admiring letter? Perhaps he did. At all events, Wesley's most intimate and confidential friendship with both Fletcher and Miss Bosanquet was such as to justify utterances, which, under other circumstances, would have been almost impertinent. In his sermon on the death of Fletcher, Wesley remarked, "Miss Bosanquet was the only person in England whom I judged to be worthy of Mr. Fletcher;" and again, in a letter to Hester Ann Rogers, written a month after the marriage took place, he observed, "I should not have been willing that Miss Bosanquet should have been joined to any other person than Mr. Fletcher."[1] To some, such language may seem unusual, but, in reality, it was natural; for Wesley had long been regarded as their father in Christ, both by Fletcher and his wife; and, no doubt, both of them had consulted him with respect to the step they proposed to take.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 143.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, 1788, p. 48.

After all, Fletcher's matrimonial offer was a curious incident. He was now fifty-two years of age. For the last four years and a-half, he had been absent from his parish, and so seriously ill, that, again and again, his friends expected him to die. Some of his views, also, of ministers marrying at all were rather peculiar, though rational and sound. In his "Portrait of St. Paul," composed in Switzerland, and revised and finished after his return to Madeley, Fletcher wrote:—

> "When a man is perpetually called to travel from place to place, prudence requires that he should not encumber himself with those domestic cares, which must occasion many unavoidable delays in the prosecution of his business: or, if he derives his maintenance from the generosity of the poor, charity should constrain him to burden them as little as possible. St. Paul could not prevail upon himself to expose a woman and children to those innumerable dangers, which he was constantly obliged to encounter. The first peril, from which he made his escape, was that which compelled him to descend from the wall of Damascus in a basket: now if a family had shared with him in the same danger, what an addition would they have made to his affliction and his care! Is it not evident, that, in such circumstances, every man, who is not obliged to marry from reasons either physical or moral, is called to imitate the example of this disinterested Apostle, from the same motives of prudence and charity. This indefatigable preacher, always on a mission, judged it advisable to continue in a single state to the end of his days: but, had he been fixed in a particular church;

---

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. xiii., p. 78.

Digitized by Google

had he there felt how much it concerns a minister neither to tempt others, nor to be tempted himself; and had he known how much assistance a modest, provident, and pious woman is capable of affording a pastor, by inspecting the women of his flock, he would then probably have advised every resident pastor to enter into the marriage state, provided they should fix upon regenerate persons, capable of edifying the Church."

Probably, while writing this, Fletcher was thinking of Wesley and his itinerant preachers, and also of the difference between them and himself, as the Vicar of Madeley. Be that as it may, from the doctrine he has laid down, he deduces the following principles:—

"1. In times of great trouble and grievous persecutions, the followers of Christ should abstain from marriage, unless obliged thereto by particular and powerful reasons. 2. The faithful, who mean to embrace the nuptial state, should be careful, on no account, to connect themselves with any persons, except such as are remarkable for their seriousness and piety. 3. Missionaries ought not to marry, unless there is an absolute necessity. 4. A bishop, or resident pastor, is usually called to the marriage state. 5. A minister of the Gospel, who is able to live in a state of celibacy *for the kingdom of heaven's sake*, that he may have no other care except that of preaching the Gospel and attending upon the members of Christ's mystical body,—such a one is undoubtedly called to continue in a single state."

Many will disapprove of some of Fletcher's deductions; but it is easier to disapprove than to refute.

On the 8th of June, 1781, Miss Bosanquet received Fletcher's offer of marriage. They had long admired each other, but, when they first became acquainted, Fletcher regarded Miss Bosanquet's fortune as an insuperable barrier to their union; and Miss Bosanquet was too much occupied with her philanthropic schemes to think of being married. Now, Fletcher, to a great extent, was an invalid, and, as much as any man alive, needed a pious and loving nurse. Miss Bosanquet, also, was in a quagmire of financial embarrassments, and greatly needed a tender, judicious friend.

Fletcher's letter, despatched early in the month of June, led to a correspondence which lasted till August 1, when Fletcher arrived in Yorkshire to attend Wesley's Conference at Leeds. Miss Bosanquet writes:—

"Mr. Fletcher came to Cross Hall, and abode there a month; preaching in different places with much power. Having opened our whole hearts to each other, both on temporals and spirituals, we believed it to be the order of God that we should become one, when He should make our way plain."[1]

Properly enough, Fletcher wished, before marrying Miss Bosanquet, to consult her family, and to obtain their approval. To this she consented; and, three weeks after his return to Madeley, Fletcher wrote the following, hitherto unpublished, letters. Some will condemn the printing of this private correspondence; but as it contains nothing but what is honourable to all the parties concerned, and as it exhibits the Vicar of Madeley in a new position, most readers will be thankful for it.

The first letter was addressed to Miss Bosanquet, and shows the ardour of her wooer:—

"MADELEY, *September* 22, 1781.

"MY DEAREST FRIEND,—I have received thy dear letter, with the one enclosed from thy brother. I shall send it back to thee by Mr. Brisco,[2] who will call here on his way to Birstal.

"O Polly! generous, faithful Polly! dost thou indeed permit me to write to thy friends, and to ask the invaluable gift of thy hand? That hand, that is *half* mine, shall be wholly mine. I have, to-day, written two letters,—one to thy uncle, the other to thy elder brother. Correct them, and, when thou hast, forward them with much prayer and love. Back them with some of thy sweet arguments. Thou knowest how to come at thy friends. I don't: I have only followed my instinct for thee in this new business.

"Polly! I read thy letter, and wondered at the expression in it,—'*If you think me worth writing for.*' Ah! my holy, my loving, my lovely, my precious friend, I think thee worth writing for *with my vital blood:* I am only sorry that I had not thee beside me to write with *thy wisdom.* However, I write by the *first* post: direct the letters properly; and excuse my *sending them by thee,* as I don't remember the names and streets.

"'Difficulties!' If thou hast any, I shall gladly share them with thee, and think myself well repaid with the pleasure of praying and praising *with thee,* and *for thee.* Therefore, do not talk of *struggling through alone.* I charge thee, by thy faithfulness, let me be *alone* as little time as thou canst.

"'Three thousand pounds' with thee! My dear, if thou art mine, and canst live in our cottage here, praising and blessing God, I shall rejoice more than Mephibosheth, when, through joy, he said, 'Let Ziba take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come back in peace' (2 Sam. xix. 30). Let not thy wisdom, Polly, make thee suspect and surmise evil. Let thy charity make thee hope all things for thy friends.

---

[1] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life."

[2] Thomas Brisco, a fine old Methodist Itinerant Preacher, at that time the Superintendent of the Birstal Circuit.

"I thank thee for that believing sentence,—' But, all shall be right.' The worst thy friends can do is to keep thy money, which I look upon as dung and dross in comparison of thee. Ah Polly! with the *treasure* of *thy* friendship, and the *unsearchable* riches of Christ, how rich thinkest thou I am? Count—cast up—but thou wilt never make out the amazing sum.

"So thou wilt keep 'two years' from me to bring me some money! Oh, Polly! that is a saying more worthy of Change Alley than of the paradise of love. Let me comfort thee a little. If thou lovest me half as much as I do thee, thou wilt think thyself rich. *Thou* art worth to me a *million;* and cannot *I* be worth thy £5,000?

"I embrace thee in spirit, and more than mix my soul with thine. Farewell!

"J. FLETCHER."

The two letters referred to in this sweethearting epistle, and addressed to Miss Bosanquet's uncle, Claudius Bosanquet, Esq., and to her brother, S. Bosanquet, Esq., were the following:—

"To Claudius Bosanquet, Esq.

"MADELEY, *September* 22, 1781.

"SIR,—Permit a stranger to claim some moments of the time you consecrate to your neighbours' happiness and the welfare of your own family.

"I was born in the Pays de Vaud at Nyon, a town about fifteen miles north of Geneva, on the borders of the lake. My father, in his youth, was an officer in the French service, which he left to marry. He was afterwards a colonel in the militia of his country, and a judge or assessor to the lord-lieutenant of the town where he lived. I am the youngest of his eight children. Having some desires to be a clergyman, I was, for seven years, sent to Geneva to pursue my studies. But after I had stayed there seven years, a fear of being unfit for the Christian ministry, and the enticing offers of my father's brother, who was a lieutenant-colonel in the Dutch service, made me for a time prefer the sword to the gown. I left the academy" [at Geneva] "and went to Flanders to join my eldest brother, who was an officer in the Dutch service; but, before I could enter the army, the peace was made, and my uncle, on whom my hopes depended, left the service.

"Seeing my way to military preferment blocked up by these two events, I came to England, to get more perfect in the English tongue, which I had begun to learn at Geneva. Some months after I was come over, Mr. Des Champs, a French minister, to whom I had been recommended, procured me the place of tutor to the son of Mr. Hill, member of Parliament for Shrewsbury. In his family I lived some years, and applied myself to the study of divinity; and, at his request, and by his interest, I got into Orders; a calling which now suited my more serious turn of mind.

"It was soon after my ordination that I saw Miss Mary Bosanquet, your pious niece. I had resolved not to marry, but the sweetness of her temper, and her devotedness to God, made me think that if ever I broke through my resolution, it would be to cast my lot with one like her.

"Not long after, at Mr. Hill's request, his nephew, Mr. Kinaston, member for Montgomery, presented me to the living of Madeley, a little market-town in the county of Salop, worth about £100 per annum; and here I have chiefly lived, sequestered from the world, as your amiable niece has done at Leyton and at Cross Hall.

"After having corresponded some years with her on various subjects, last spring, on my return from a journey to the continent, I ventured to mention to her my first thoughts about a closer union with her,—thoughts which I had kept to myself for nearly twenty-five years. After maturely discussing the point, your pious niece has given me room to hope she will give me her hand, if you, Sir, whom she honours as a father, give your consent to our union. I earnestly ask it, Sir; and beg you will share the pleasure of uniting two persons who, from a remarkable agreement of taste, sentiments, and pursuits, as well as from a particular sympathy, seem formed for each other by the God of nature and of grace.

"I wish, Sir, I had a fortune equal to Miss Bosanquet's deserts; but I hope I have one suitable to her piety, and to the moderate wishes of that godliness which, together with contentment, is a great gain. I have only about £1,500 worth of property in my native country, and about £400 or £500 more in my parish, besides the income of my living, and a house much better than those with which most country clergymen are obliged to put up.

"Whatever be your pious niece's fortune, I assure you, Sir, I seek her person, not her property; and to convince you of it, I request that before she gives me her hand, her whole fortune may be secured to her by a proper settlement.

"With respect to my character, and the truth of what I have here advanced, I beg leave to refer you, Sir, to four creditable persons. With regard to my conduct, and what I affirm of myself as Vicar of Madeley, you may get proper informations from Thomas Hill, Esq., now in Salop, the old gentleman in whose house or neighbourhood I have lived very near thirty years; and from his son, Noel Hill, Esq., member for Shropshire, the gentleman to whom I was tutor. With respect to what I have mentioned of myself as a native of Switzerland, you may, Sir, procure proper informations from two clergymen now in that country, Mr. De Bons and Mr. Tavan, whom I saw last Christmas at Lausanne, and whom you have probably seen in London, when they served French churches there.

"I would, Sir, have waited upon you in person, in London, if some journeys which my curate must take did not oblige me to stay here to serve my own church.

"I shall have the honour to write upon the same subject to Miss Bosanquet's brothers, and shall take the liberty of referring them to this letter, for some account of him who aspires to the hand of their pious sister; and who, with respect to temporal happiness, desires nothing so ardently as to have your leave to add the name of nephew to that of, Sir, your most humble and obedient servant,

"JOHN DELAFLECHERE.

"P.S.—Soon after I came to England, my English friends, complaining of the length of my Swiss name, began to contract it by dropping the French syllables of it. So they called me Fletcher; and by that name I have been known among the English ever since. If you favour me with an answer, Sir, it will find me if it is directed thus:—

"Mr. Fletcher,
"Vicar of Madeley,
"Near Shiffnal,
"Shropshire."

The letter addressed to Miss Bosanquet's brother was as follows:—

"MADELEY, NEAR SHIFFNAL, SHROPSHIRE,
"*September* 22, 1781.

"SIR,—Aspiring to the happiness of being united to your pious sister, Miss Bosanquet, and to the honour of being, by her means, connected with your family, I should be wanting both to my duty and my inclination if I proceeded in my addresses to her without informing you of my design, and asking your approbation of it.

"By this post I send to Claudius Bosanquet, Esq., some account of myself, which I hope he will communicate to you, Sir, and to your brother. I shall only add two things.

"Among the reasons which hindered me from making my addresses to your amiable sister, when first I felt that sympathy which binds my soul to hers, the superiority of her fortune was not the least. Since that time, debts, which unforeseen circumstances led her to contract, have considerably lessened that difficulty; and the prudent fear of contracting new ones seems to make it expedient for her to get into a state where she may, without difficulty and with propriety, bring her expensive housekeeping within narrower bounds. That end will at once be attained if she favours me with her hand.

"Further, in extricating herself from some difficulties, she will crown the wishes of the oldest and warmest of her friends; and contribute not to my happiness only, but to that of my numerous flock. You are too well acquainted with your pious sister's turn of mind not to know that Providence designed her for a clergyman's partner and fellow-helper. Her instructions, her employment, her very pleasures from her childhood, have led her to assist her neighbours in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. She has even been blamed for the warmth of her zeal. But what seemed rather awkward and improper in a single woman, will become highly expedient and highly commendable in a clergyman's wife. The *secondary* inspection and care of the children and women of a flock of two thousand souls will then naturally devolve to her share, and in some sense become her duty.

"I hope that if you, Sir, your worthy uncle, your brother, and Mrs. Gassen[1] weigh these particulars you will consent to our union, and by that means contribute more than I can express to the happiness, Sir, of your most humble and most obedient servant,

"J. FLETCHER."

In due time, in a letter, dated "Forest House, October 2, 1781," S. Bosanquet, Esq., informed Fletcher that he approved of the proposed marriage; but added :—

"My sister's fortune is so encumbered, that nothing but the sale of all her landed estate can free her from her difficulties; and, if that portion of her fortune, which came to her by my father's will, had not been tied up, she would have been ruined."[2]

A fortnight later, Mr. S. Bosanquet wrote to his sister, and gave her an account of her fortune, amounting in the aggregate to £10,500. He then told her that she had already squandered the whole of this amount, with the exception of £4,500 settled on trustees, for her benefit, by her father's will. He continued :—

"One reason why my father secured this money, by leaving it on trust, was, lest, by your placing too great confidence in those with whom you were connected, and by your endeavouring to do more good than your circumstances would afford, you might be left destitute."

He then added :—

"I cannot conclude without remarking that, although you are encumbered with debts, you must be, at least, an equal match for Mr. Fletcher. Your two estates[3] have always been considered as fully equal to your debts; but, suppose they should not turn out to be so, the difference cannot be very great; and, as the remainder of your income exceeds £200 a year, it at least equals Mr. Fletcher's income, such as it has been stated to me; besides the consideration that the greater part of his income dies with him, and the capital of yours survives in case there should be children, for their benefit.''[1]

---

[1] Miss Bosanquet's married sister. The two sisters began their *religious* life together at a very early age.

[2] Unpublished letter.

[3] The Leytonstone estate, valued at £3,000; and that bequeathed by her grandmother, valued at £2,500.

At the same time, Miss Bosanquet's brother William, in a letter dated "Lime Street, London, October 16, 1781," replied to her wail that she could "carry Mr. Fletcher nothing but debts," and stated that he was in favour of her marrying Fletcher.[2]

Before taking leave of the Bosanquet family, it may be added, that Mr. S. Bosanquet sent his sister, as his wedding present, a pair of silver candlesticks;[3] and that her brother William, in a letter dated "November 27, 1781," and addressed "Mrs. Fletcher, Cross Hall, Morley Common, near Leeds," wrote:—

> "I cannot but hope the greatest happiness will attend your union with a gentleman to whom, by general report, the highest praise is due. Permit me to wish you joy on this occasion, and to add my best respects to Mr. Fletcher, assuring him that I shall be happy to cultivate his acquaintance, and to show him every attention in my power.''[4]

With this loving letter, Mr. William Bosanquet forwarded to his sister a nuptial present of £100.

Another fact must be mentioned. William Bosanquet loved his sister, and, not only now, but in aftertime, he showed the genuineness of his affection by his deeds. The uncle, Claudius Bosanquet, in his last will and testament, bequeathed to Miss Bosanquet's two brothers £18,000 each; but Miss Bosanquet and her sister Gassen were unnamed. At the uncle's death, their brother William, ever generous and open-handed, gave them £500 each; when Fletcher died, he presented to the widow £40 a year to relieve the wants of the poor of Madeley; and when he himself died, in 1813, he bequeathed her the sum of £2,000.

These details have not been given without a reason. Some ill-informed Methodists have a sort of floating idea that Fletcher's marriage was an unequal one—that is, they seem to think that the Bosanquet family was much more respectable than that of Fletcher; and that Miss Bosanquet's fortune was much greater than the fortune of the man who became her loving and devoted husband. Enough has been said to show the inaccuracy of this. Fletcher's family was quite equal, in point of respectability, to the Bosanquet family, and, perhaps, superior; and his yearly income was not less than that of the lady who rejoiced to become his wife. Never was there a marriage more free from mercenariness than that of John Fletcher, of Madeley, and Mary Bosanquet, of Cross Hall, Yorkshire. It was, in the highest and purest sense, a love-match. The letters, just given, exhibit Fletcher's affection, disinterestedness, honour, and respect for others. Miss Bosanquet had still a remnant of her fortune; but he wished the whole of this to be settled upon herself. He wished to marry her, but, before carrying out his wish, as a courteous gentleman, he asked for the approbation of her family, thereby setting a good example to his inferiors and juniors. She wished to marry him; but, shrinking from the idea of involving him in her pecuniary embarrassments, she proposed to postpone the marriage till her affairs were in a more settled state. Her family were consulted by Fletcher; and they responded in the most kind and straightforward manner. In genius, talent, and learning, Fletcher was immensely Miss Bosanquet's superior; but, for pure, ardent, disinterested, unselfish love, it is impossible to decide which of the two was entitled to bear the palm.

---

[1] Unpublished letter.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

Consent to the marriage having been obtained from the Bosanquet family, Fletcher made an arrangement to spend the remainder of the year with his affianced in Yorkshire. The well-known Rev. John Crosse,[1] Vicar of Bradford, took Fletcher's pulpit at Madeley, and Fletcher took Mr. Crosse's at Bradford.[2] To some, this may seem somewhat strange; but it must be borne in mind that Miss Bosanquet's temporal affairs were in a most entangled state, and that it was of great importance that her Cross Hall property should be sold, and all her business assets and debts in Yorkshire satisfactorily settled before her removal to Madeley. Fletcher went to help his intended bride, and did help her; for her brother William, in a letter, written to her a fortnight after her marriage, observed, "You have done very well in disposing of your place."[1] For months past, she had been longing and trying to turn her troublesome property into money: now she succeeded in doing so. A week after Fletcher's arrival, "a gentleman came quite unexpectedly, and bought" the Cross Hall[2] estate "for £1,620; and, three days afterwards, another took the stock, etc." Arrangements were also made for the locating of her domestic dependants; and she was enabled to write:—

---

[1] Mr. Crosse had been acquainted with Miss Bosanquet when she resided at Leytonstone, and, from that time to this, a warm friendship had existed between them. ("Life of Crosse," by Morgan, p. 8.)

[2] "Life of Rev. John Crosse," by Morgan, p. 9.

> "All was now so far settled, that I did not need to sell Leytonstone estate. My income would afford to allow my dispersed family £55 per year; pay the interest of the money still owing; and yet leave me such an annual sum as was about equal to my dear Mr. Fletcher's; and, in case of my death, there was in Leytonstone more than would pay all. So, on Monday, the 12th of November, 1781, in Batley Church, we covenanted in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to bear each other's burdens, and to become one for ever."[3]

Fletcher reached Cross Hall towards the end of October, 1781, and continued there till January 2, 1782, when he and his bride set out for Madeley. A glimpse of this brief interval, and of his unique wedding, may interest the reader.

Of course, Fletcher had to preach every Sunday in Mr. Crosse's church; but, in addition to this, he also preached in Methodist chapels. Samuel Bradburn, at that time Wesley's "Assistant" in the Bradford Circuit, wrote:—

> "Mr. Fletcher is married to Miss Bosanquet. Such a pair! I am inclined to think there never was a holier, or a happier, couple, since Adam ate the forbidden fruit. At all events, I can say, such a man and woman I never knew married before. He has preached in two of our houses at Halifax and Bradford; and I think that there never were two better sermons preached in England."[4]

---

[1] Unpublished letter.

[2] Cross Hall still exists; at all events, it did a few years ago, when the present writer visited it—a square, substantial, two-story edifice, built of stone, shaded with trees, and having a good garden behind it.

[3] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore, p. 142.

[4] Unpublished letter.

This, from one of the greatest of Methodism's pulpit orators, was no ordinary praise.

Mrs. Crosby was one of the members of Miss Bosanquet's family, and wrote :—

"Mr. Fletcher's general conversation, while at Cross Hall, was praising God, and speaking of the love of our dear Redeemer. He took opportunities of speaking to every one in the family, concerning the state of their souls, and of giving them suitable directions. At other times, he met us all together, and exhorted us. Our daily meals were like sacraments. When he drank to any one, it was, 'Heavenly health!' or 'The cup of salvation!' At, or after each meal, he generally began, or called upon us to begin, to sing—

"'Still, O my soul, prolong
The never-ceasing song!
Christ my theme, my hope, my joy!
His be all my happy days!
Praise my every hour employ:
Every breath be spent in praise!'

"Thus did he walk with God, filled with the Spirit: confirming his love to all the family, and caring for both their spiritual and temporal concerns. He preached in many places while in Yorkshire, and to numerous congregations. Many were blest thereby; some convinced of sin; others comforted. Whenever he either preached or conversed, the comforts of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.

"Monday, *November* 12, was the day appointed for the marriage. On the morning of this day, several friends met together. They reached Cross Hall before family prayers. Mr. Fletcher was dressed in his canonicals. After giving out one of Mr. Wesley's marriage hymns, he read Rev. xix. 7, 8, 9, 'Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.' Mr. Fletcher then spoke from these verses, in such a manner as greatly tended to spiritualize the solemnities of the day. He said, 'We invite you to our wedding; but the Holy Ghost invites you to the marriage of the Lamb. The bride, the Lamb's wife, represents the whole Church, triumphant and militant united together. You may all be the Bride, and Jesus will condescend to be the Bridegroom. Make yourselves ready by being filled with the Spirit.' He then engaged in prayer, and said, 'Lord, thou knowest we would not take this step, if we had not eternity in view, and if we were not as willing to be carried into the churchyard, as to go into the church.' At breakfast, he remarked, 'The postilions are now ready to carry us to the church; but death will soon be here to carry us to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

"On the way to Batley Church, which was nearly two miles distant, he spoke much of the mystery represented by marriage, namely the union between Christ and His Church. They were married in the face of the congregation: the doors were opened, and everyone came in that would. We then returned home, and spent a considerable time in singing and prayer. There were nearly twenty of us. I then presented Mrs. Fletcher with some wedding hymns. She looked over them, and gave them to Mr. Fletcher. He read the Scripture text at the top, namely, 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.' Then turning to the company, he said, 'My God, what a task! Help me, my friends, by your prayers, to fulfil it. As Christ loved the Church! He laid aside His glory for the Church; He submitted to be born into our world; to be clothed with a human body, subject to all our sinless infirmities; He endured shame, contempt, pain, yea, death itself for His Church! O my God, none is able to fulfil this task, without Thine Almighty aid! Help me, O my God! Pray for me, O my friends!

"He next read, 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands.' Mrs. Fletcher added, 'As unto the Lord.' 'Well, my dear,' returned Mr. Fletcher, 'only in the Lord. And if ever I wish you to do anything otherwise, resist me with all your might.'

"From dinner, which was a spiritual meal as well as a natural one, until tea-time, our time was chiefly spent in prayer or singing. After singing the covenant hymn, Mr. Fletcher went to Mrs. Fletcher, and said to her, 'Well, my dearest friend, will you unite with me in joining ourselves in a perpetual covenant to the Lord? Will you with me serve Him in His members? Will you help me to bring souls to the Blessed Redeemer? And, in every possible way, this day lay yourself under the strongest ties you can, to help me to glorify my gracious Lord? She answered, 'May my God help me so to do!'

"In the evening, Mr. Valton[1] preached in the hall, from, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.' His words did not fall to the ground; many were greatly refreshed. After the preaching, there was a sweet contest among us: every one thought, 'I, in particular, owe the greatest debt of praise;' at length we agreed to sing,—

---

[1] John Valton, one of Wesley's Preachers, then in the seventh year of his itinerancy, and labouring in the Birstal Circuit. He wrote: "On the 12th of November, 1781, Mr. Fletcher stole hallowed fire from my people, by taking away Miss Bosanquet. I and a few friends accompanied them to Batley Church. Surely, such a blessed wedding I never knew before. By request, I improved the occasion in the evening, from these words, 'What shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon His name.' It was a refreshing time; and many prayers were offered that eternal blessings might crown the devoted pair." ("Life of the Rev. John Valton," p. 104.)

"'I'll praise my Maker, while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.'"[1]

Is there on record another wedding day such as this? To criticise the account would spoil it. It may, however, interest the reader to give a verbatim copy of the marriage certificate:—

"No. 112. John William Fletcher, of the parish of Madeley, in the county of Salop, Clerk, and Mary Bosanquet, of this parish, were married in this church (Batley) by license, this twelfth day of November, in the year 1781, by me, John Deighton, Curate.

"This marriage was solemnized between us, John William Fletcher, or De la Flechere, and Mary Bosanquet, in the presence of William Smith and Ann Tripp."

Twelve days after the marriage, Wesley wrote to Fletcher the following characteristic letter:—

"LONDON, *November* 24, 1781.

"DEAR SIR,—There is not a person to whom I would have wished Miss Bosanquet joined besides you. But this union, I am thoroughly persuaded, is of God; and so are all the children of God with whom I have spoken. Mr. Bosanquet's being so agreeable to it, I look upon as a token for good; and so was the ready disposing of the house and stock, which otherwise would have been a great encumbrance.

"From the first day which you spend together at Madeley, I hope you will lay down an exactly regular plan of living; something like that of the happy family at Leytonstone. Let your light shine to all that are round about you. And let Sister Fletcher do as much as she can for God, and no more. To His care I commit you both, and am, my dear friends,

"Your very affectionate brother,
"JOHN WESLEY."[2]

A curious letter to be written to a man on his being married; but Wesley and Fletcher were far too earnest, and were engaged in far too great a work, to permit them to write commonplace and empty congratulations.

One of the first acts of Fletcher, after his marriage, was to make a settlement of his own monetary matters. The following is an exact copy of his will, written by himself:—

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 154.

> "This is the last Will and Testament of John William Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, in the County of Salop, whereby I give and bequeath to my dear wife, Mary Fletcher, all my personal estate, of what nature or kind soever, in the kingdom of Great Britain, for her own use and benefit.
>
> "With regard to my personal estate in Switzerland, I give and bequeath it all to my second brother, Henry de la Fletcher, assessor to the Lord Bailie, at Nyon, in the Canton of Berne, on condition that he or his heirs will take care to pay to my said dear wife, Mary Fletcher, or order, the income or produce of that personal estate during the term of her natural life; and, in case my said brother or his heirs do not fulfil this condition, according to the tenour of this Will, then my said wife shall sell, or cause to be sold, that my said personal estate in Switzerland, for her own use and benefit; and get the money over to England, on condition that she shall pay one hundred crowns to the poor of Nyon, in the said Canton of Berne.[1]
>
> "And I do hereby appoint my said dear wife sole executrix of this my last Will and Testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 24th of December, 1781.
>
> "JOHN WILLIAM FLETCHER, OR DE LA FLECHERE.
>
> "Signed and sealed by the Testator, and by him declared to be his last Will and Testament, in the presence of us,
>
> "JOHN VALTON.
> "RICHARD TAYLOR.
> "THOMAS GARFORTH."[2]

Fletcher's marriage was, in all respects, a happy one. He was thankful for his wife, and proud of her. Hence the following letter to "The Hon. Mrs. C——:"

> "CROSS HALL, YORKSHIRE, *December* 26, 1781.
>
> "MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—Your favour of the 4th instant did not reach me until a considerable time after date, through my being still absent from Madeley; a clergyman of this neighbourhood having made

---

[1] Fletcher's relatives in Switzerland most faithfully fulfilled this part of Fletcher's Will. In an unpublished letter to Mrs. Crosby, dated June 20, 1786, his widow wrote:—

"My brother Henry possesses so much of the spirit of my dear husband, that his care of me exceeds all imagination. The family have sent me a bond, laying in their own estates as security to forward me the whole produce every year. I do not yet know exactly what it will be; but it is far better than I thought; and so is everything in which my dearest Mr. Fletcher has been concerned."

[2] *The Wesley Banner*, 1850, p. 314.

an exchange with me, to facilitate my settling some temporal affairs in this county.

"The kind part you take in my happiness demands my warmest thanks; and I beg you will accept them, multiplied by those which my dear partner presents to you. Yes, my dear friend, I am married in my old age, and have a new opportunity of considering a great mystery, in the most perfect type of our Lord's mystical union with His Church. I have now a new call to pray for a fulness of Christ's holy, gentle, meek, loving Spirit, that I may love my wife, as He loved His spouse, the Church. But the emblem is greatly deficient: the Lamb is worthy of His spouse, and more than worthy; whereas I must acknowledge myself unworthy of the yoke-fellow, whom heaven has reserved for me. She is a person after my own heart; and, I make no doubt, we shall increase the number of the happy marriages in the Church militant.

"Indeed, they are not so many, but it may be worth a Christian's while to add one more to the number. God declared it was not good that man, a social being, should live alone, and, therefore, He gave him a help-meet for him. For the same reason, our Lord sent forth His disciples two and two. Had I searched the three kingdoms, I could not have found one brother willing to share gratis my weal, woe, and labours, and complaisant enough to unite his fortunes to mine; but God has found me a partner, *a sister, a wife,* to use St. Paul's language, who is not afraid to face with me the colliers and bargemen of my parish, until death part us.

"Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps, and wait for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom." [1]

Before leaving this memorable year, 1781, it must be added that, twenty days after Fletcher's marriage, his beloved friend and travelling companion, William Perronet, died, on his way to England, at Douay. Three months before this event took place, Fletcher remarked, in a letter to William Perronet's venerable father:—

"Madeley, September 4, 1781. I have been for some weeks in Yorkshire, chiefly at the house of an old friend of mine, Miss Bosanquet, whose happy family put me in mind of yours. At my return home, I have found a letter from my brother, who informs me that my dear friend, your son, continues very weak. He is now at Gimel, a fine village between Lausanne and Geneva, where Miss Perronet's sister is settled. There he rides, and drinks ass's milk, and breathes the purest air. Mrs. Perronet is there with her two daughters, so that if the illness of my dear friend should grow more grievous, he will not want for good attendance and the most tender nursing."[2]

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 281.
[2] *Methodist Magazine*, 1817, p. 864.

Now, in another letter to the father of William Perronet, Fletcher wrote :—

"I condole with you, Rev. and dear Sir, about the death of my dear friend and your dear son. We shall one day see why our heavenly Father made your sons go before you, and my kind physician before me. About the time he died, so far as I can find by your kind letter, a strong concern about him fell upon me by day and by night, insomuch that I could not help waking my wife to join me in praying for him; and at once that concern ceased, nor have I since had any such spiritual feeling, whence I concluded that the conflict I supposed my friend to be in was ended. But how surprised was I to find it was *by death!* Well, whether Paul or Apollos, or life or *death*, all things are ours through Jesus, who knows how to bring good out of evil, and how to blow us into the harbour by a cross wind, or even by a dreadful storm."[1]

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE AT MADELEY.

1782 AND 1783.

IN a letter to an aristocratic friend in London, Fletcher began the year 1782 as follows:—

"January 1, 1782. I live, blessed be God, to devote myself again to His blessed service in this world or in the next, and to wish my dear friends all the blessings of a year of jubilee. Whatever this year brings forth, may it bring us the fullest measures of salvation attainable on earth, and the most complete preparation for heaven.

"I have a solemn call to gird my loins and keep my lamp burning. Strangely restored to health and strength (considering my years), I have ventured to preach of late as often as I did formerly; and after having read prayers and preached twice on Christmas-day, I did, last Sunday, what I had never done,—I continued doing duty from ten o'clock in the morning till after four in the afternoon. This was owing to christenings, churchings, and the sacrament, which I administered to a church full of people,[1] so that I was obliged to go from the communion table to begin the evening service, and then to visit some sick. This has brought back upon me one of my old, dangerous symptoms; so I have flattered myself in vain that I should be able to do the whole duty of my own parish. My dear wife is nursing me with the tenderest care; gives me up to God with the greatest resignation; and helps me to rejoice that life and death, health and sickness, work for our good, and are all *ours*, as blessed means to forward us in our journey to heaven.

"We intend to set out for Madeley to-morrow. The prospect of a winter's journey is not sweet; but the prospect of meeting you, and your dear sister, and Lady Mary Fitzgerald, and all our other companions in tribulation in heaven, is delightful. If Lady Huntingdon is in London, I beg you to present my duty to her, with my best wishes."[2]

---

[1] No doubt this six hours' continuous service took place in the parish church, Bradford.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 283.

Fletcher and his bride left Cross Hall on Wednesday, January 2, 1782. Mrs. Fletcher wrote :—

"1782, January 2. We set out for Madeley. Where shall I begin my song of praise? What a turn is there in all my affairs! From what a depth of sorrow, distress, and perplexity am I delivered! How shall I find language to express the goodness of the Lord! I know no want but that of more grace. I have a husband, in everything suited to me. He bears with all my faults and failings in a manner that continually reminds me of the text, 'Love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.' His constant endeavour is to make me happy; his strongest desire is for my spiritual growth. He is, in every sense of the word, the man my highest reason chooses to obey. I am also happy in a servant[1] whom I took from the side of her mother's coffin when she was four years old. She loves us as if we were her parents, and is also truly devoted to God."[2]

On January 6, Fletcher and his wife spent their first Sunday at Madeley. Seventeen years afterwards, Mrs. Fletcher remarked :—

"The first Sabbath after I came to Madeley my dear husband took me into the kitchen, where his people were assembled to partake of refreshment between the times of worship. He introduced me to them, saying, 'I have not married this wife for myself only, but for your sakes also.'"

And then the happy throng sang the hymn beginning with the verse—

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow
The gladly solemn sound;
Let all the nations know,
To earth's remotest bound;
The year of jubilee is come!
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home."

A few weeks after this, Wesley paid his friends a visit of one day and two nights. He says :—

"1782. Saturday, March 23. It was with a good deal of difficulty that we got" [from Kidderminster] "to Bridgenorth, much of the road being blocked up with snow. In the afternoon, we had another kind of difficulty; the roads were so rough and so deep that we were in danger, every now and then, of leaving our wheels behind us. But, by adding two horses to my own, at length we got safe to Madeley.

---

[1] Sarah Lawrence.
[2] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."

> "Both Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher complained that, after all the pains they had taken they could not prevail on the people to join in Society; no, nor even to meet in class. Resolved to try, I preached to a crowded audience on 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.' I followed the blow in the afternoon by strongly applying those words, 'Awake, thou that sleepest;' and then enforcing the necessity of Christian fellowship on all who desired either to awake or keep awake. I then desired those that were willing to join together for this purpose to call upon me and Mr. Fletcher after service. Ninety-four or ninety-five persons did so—about as many men as women. We explained to them the nature of a Christian Society, and they willingly joined therein."[1]

Methodist preachers, for some time past, had preached in Madeley Wood, Coalbrookdale, and other adjacent places, and here Society Classes seem to have been formed; but, up to the present, the Methodist people at Madeley had refused to meet in class. Henceforth, it was different. This altered state of things was owing partly to Wesley and to Fletcher, but chiefly to Fletcher's devoted wife.

At the time of Wesley's visit, there was living at Little Dawley, near Madeley, a child nearly four years old, who, nineteen years afterwards, became a Methodist Itinerant Preacher, and who, in 1879, died in the one hundred and first year of his age—the tall, stalwart, grand old William Tranter. Naturally, Mr. Tranter loved Madeley, and affectionately cherished the memory of Fletcher and his wife. In an article published forty-five years ago, he wrote:—

> "When Mr. Wesley's preachers came to the neighbourhood of Madeley, Mr. Fletcher hospitably received those laborious servants of God into his house; the vicarage kitchen, before consecrated by his prayers, was now further consecrated by their earnest and faithful preaching; the Vicar of Madeley himself being one of their humblest and most prayerful hearers. The kitchen becoming too small, a barn on the premises was neatly fitted up for a preaching room. In this place, the Methodist travelling preachers, and the curate of the parish, regularly preached the Word of God. Here, also, Mrs. Fletcher, after the removal of her holy husband to his heavenly rest, held her meetings for exposition of the Scriptures, religious experience, and prayer. Surviving her husband many years" (thirty), "she lived a widow indeed, doing good to all around her, and winning the veneration and love of rich and poor, not only in the village and parish of Madeley, and in the adjoining parishes, but in all places where she was known, and to which the fame of her piety and charity had extended. The rector not only allowed her

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.

to remain in the vicarage-house, undisturbed during life, but allowed her to choose the curate by whom the duties of the living were to be performed; assigning as his reason, that she knew better than himself what would suit and benefit the parishioners. Besides exercising publicly, at stated times, in the vicarage room, she occasionally visited Madeley Wood, Coalbrookdale, Coalport, and other places more distant, at which times the chapels were usually crowded with delighted and profited hearers. To her house, the Itinerant Preachers continued to come to the end of her earthly sojourn. Here they always found a hearty welcome, and a delightful home. Several lovely Societies were formed, others were augmented, hundreds of souls were converted, Christian believers were edified and blessed, the fruit of Mr. Fletcher's ministry was preserved, and Madeley became the rendezvous for religious persons and purposes—a privileged, honoured place,—a sort of Christian Jerusalem. It was not uncommon to see two, three, or more clergymen, pious and able men, from neighbouring and even distant parishes, among the congregation at her week-night lectures. On the Sabbath, the pious people, living at the distance of from one to four miles from Madeley, usually arrived in time for her morning meeting, at nine o'clock; and, from there, they went to the parish church close at hand. At noon, respectable strangers, visiting Madeley for religious purposes, were usually invited to dine with her at the vicarage; the poor, living too far off to allow them to return from their own houses for the after services of the day, partook, if so disposed, of her hospitalities in the vicarage-kitchen; others, having brought their provisions with them, were seen, in fine weather, in little companies in the fields, engaged in heavenly conversation and prayer; and others of the respectable portion of these pious people, had, in an apartment to themselves, a cheap family dinner provided at the village inn. On the ringing of a bell, at one o'clock, all assembled at Mrs. Fletcher's meeting, when she was accustomed to read the life of some eminently holy man, and make remarks upon it; then they adjourned to the church, for the afternoon service there, and sermon; after which they repaired to their respective homes, and attended their own meeting-houses, at one or other of which the Curate of Madeley officiated every Sabbath evening, as well as occasionally on the week-days, always announcing at the close of the afternoon service in the church, the chapel in which he would preach that evening. This plan was adopted by Mr. Fletcher, and was followed by his evangelical and pious successors, for upwards of forty years."[1]

The godly reader will easily forgive this rich digression, and will be inclined to sing, with Charles Wesley:—

"Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,
They lived, and spake, and thought the same;
They joyfully conspired to raise
Their ceaseless sacrifice of praise.

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1837, p. 903.

"With grace abundantly endued,
A pure, believing multitude,
They all were of one heart and soul,
And only love inspired the whole.

"O what an age of golden days!
O what a choice, peculiar race!
Washed in the Lamb's all-cleansing blood,
Anointed kings and priests to God!"[1]

Madeley will long continue to be a kind of Mecca to the Methodists. Many years ago, the present writer, in company with the late Rev. Dr. Jobson, visited it. They met with the utmost courtesy, the lady of the Vicar showing them everything likely to interest a Methodist. She had a lock of Fletcher's silky hair, which she greatly prized. They were taken into Fletcher's study, about nine feet by twelve in size, and had pointed out to them a portion of the wall, still stained with Fletcher's breathings while engaged in prayer. The old barn-chapel was no longer in existence, but, near to its site, there was a small building, containing its pulpit, brass lamps, and prayer-book, together with the small oaken communion table at which Fletcher celebrated his last sacrament. The vicarage, a respectable old edifice, had beautiful gardens and grounds attached to it; and the parish church, built upon the site of the small old church, in which Fletcher ministered to crowded congregations, contained several mementoes to remind visitors of its memorable vicar. The steps leading both to the reading-desk and pulpit were those which Fletcher used to tread; and, in a small vestry, was preserved the register of all the baptisms, marriages, and deaths during his incumbency, and showing that his last baptism was on July 29, 1785, six weeks before his death. The old church, in which Fletcher preached, would hold five hundred; the present one, built in 1794, will seat about a thousand; and, since its erection, two others have been built in other parts of the parish. Besides these, the following Wesleyan Methodist chapels have been built: one in Court Street, Madeley, holding eight hundred; another, of the same size, in Madeley Wood;

---

[1] Deep indentations in the stone pillars of the vicarage gate still exist, occasioned by the Sunday visitors to Madeley sharpening their knives to eat their dinners. (Randall's "Lives and Usefulness of the Rev. J. and Mary Fletcher," p. 33.)

another, half the size, in Coalbrookdale; and a fourth at Coalport, capable of containing two hundred. And to these may be added two chapels, at Madeley and Madeley Wood, belonging to the Methodist New Connexion; and another belonging to the Primitive Methodists.

It is time to return to Fletcher. Among the first Methodists in Ireland were Henry and Robert Brooke, who, up to the year 1758, resided in the neighbourhood of Rantavan. Henry became the far-famed author of "The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland;" published, in five volumes, 1766—1770; and of other ably-written books, which gained him the friendship of Pope, Swift, and several more of the literati of his age. He married a young lady, to whom he was guardian, when she was thirteen years of age, by whom he had seventeen children, only two of whom survived him, when he died in 1783. His brother Robert had three children: Henry, the eldest, who, for about forty years, was one of the leading Methodists in Dublin; Robert, the second, a colonel in the army; and Thomas Digby, the youngest, also connected with the Dublin Methodist Society. In the year 1772, Henry wrote to Fletcher; Fletcher mistook the nephew for the uncle, whose "Fool of Quality" had recently been completed; and this amusing mistake led Fletcher to address to the famous author the following valuable epistle:—

"MADELEY, *September* 6, 1772.

"DEAR SIR,—I cannot tell you how often I have thought of thanking you for your kind letter. My controversy made me put it off some time, and, when I was going one day to answer you, a clergyman called upon me, read your letter, said you were a sensible author, and, if I would let him have it, he would let me have your 'Fool of Quality,' of which I had never heard. I forgot to take your address; but, after some months, my friend has sent me back your unexpected and welcome favour; and I now know in what street you live. A thousand thanks for your letter. May this sheet convey them from my heart to yours; and thence may they fall, like a thousand drops, into that immense ocean of goodness, truth, and love, whence come all the streams, which gladden the universe of God!

"I thankfully accept the pleasure, profit, and honour of your correspondence. But I must not deceive you; I have not yet learned the blessed precept of our Lord in respect of writing and receiving letters. I still find it more blessed to *receive*, than to *give;* and, till I have got out of this selfishness, never depend on a letter from me till you see it, and be persuaded, nevertheless, that one from you will always be welcome.

"I see, by your works, that you love truth, and that you will force your way, through all the barriers of prejudice, to embrace it in its meanest dress. That makes me love you. I hope to improve by your example and your lessons. One thing I want truly to learn, that is, that creatures and visible things are but *shadows*, and that God is God, Jehovah, the true, eternal Substance. To live practically in this truth is to live in the suburbs of heaven. Really to believe that in God we live, move, and have our being, is to find and enjoy the root of our existence: it is to slide from self into our original principle; from the carnal into the spiritual; from the visible into the invisible; from time into eternity. Give me, at your leisure, some directions, how to cease from busying myself about the husks of things, and how to break through the shell, so that I may come to the kernel of resurrection, life, and power, that lies hidden from the unbeliever's sight.

"About *feelings*. Pray, my dear Sir, are you possessed of all the feelings of your Clinton, Clement, and Harry? Are they natural to you, I mean, previous to what we generally call conversion? I have often thought that some of the feelings you describe depend a good deal upon the fineness of the nerves, and bodily organs; and, as I am rather of a Stoic turn, I have, sometimes, comforted myself in thinking, that my want of feelings might, in a degree, proceed from the dulness of Swiss nerves. If I am not mistaken, Providence directs me to you to have this important question solved. May not some persons have as much true faith, love, humanity, and pity, as others who are ten times more affected, at least for a season? And what directions would you give to a Christian Stoic, if these two ideas are not absolutely incompatible?

"My Stoicism helps me, I think, to weather out a storm of displeasure, which my little pamphlets have raised against me. You see, I at once consult you as an old friend and spiritual casuist; nor know I how to testify better to you how unreservedly I begin to be, my very dear friend,

"Yours in the Lord,

"J. FLETCHER."[1]

Probably "The Fool of Quality" was the only novel Fletcher ever read; but it taught him to respect its author. It is more than doubtful, however, whether Fletcher's letter ever reached the gentleman for whom it was intended. At all events, there is no evidence whatever that any correspondence took place between Henry Brooke, senior, and the Vicar of Madeley. Of course, Fletcher's communication reached the nephew of Brooke, and, nearly ten years afterwards, he and others wrote to Fletcher, requesting him and his newly-wedded wife to visit the Methodists in Dublin. Fletcher replied :—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 214.

"MADELEY, *April* 20, 1782.

"DEAR SIR,—Last Saturday, I received your kind invitation to take a journey to Dublin, with my wife; and we join in sincere thanks for the kind and generous offer which accompanies that invitation.

"Two reasons, at this time, concur to make me postpone the accepting of it. Not to mention my state of health, I have been so long absent from my parish, that my parishioners have a just claim to my stated labours for some time; and Mr. Bayley, my curate, being wanted at Kingswood School, I must serve my own church myself, and the duty is so continual that I dare not go twenty miles from home, much less to a neighbouring kingdom. Providence may, if it be for the glory of God, make a way for me to go, and return my thanks in person. In the meantime, I beg you, Sir, to present them to all our brethren, who set their hands to your kind letter.

"If I took you, Sir, for the author of 'The Fool of Quality,'[1] I thought I saw his style in the style of your letter; however, I was not much mistaken. Your pen is nearly allied to his, as your blood is to his. May one Spirit, the humble, loving Spirit of Jesus, make us all of one heart and soul! May we, notwithstanding the channel which separates our bodies, rejoice that one truth unites our souls, and that the common faith and love make us join daily in Christ our Head! So prays, dear Sir, your affectionate and obliged brother and servant,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

Fletcher and his wife remained at Madeley, and the latter wrote :—

"May 30, 1782. I have the kindest and tenderest of husbands; of so spiritual a man, and so spiritual a union, I had no adequate conception. He is every way suited to me, all I could wish. The work among souls increases."[3]

A few weeks later, in a letter to Wesley, she said :—

"MADELEY, *July* 7, 1782.

"VERY DEAR SIR,—I find a desire of informing you how we go on. The people you joined, when here, are, I trust, coming forward. I have not conversed with the men; but the women are more in number than at that time. Some have been clearly justified, I think five; and three or four are restored to that communion with God, which they had for some years lost. A few are athirst for a clean heart; and, on the whole, there is a good increase of freedom and liberty in our class-meetings. We have now also a band,[1] into which I gather the most lively; all that are newly blest, or that have any light into sanctification; and we have much of the presence of God with us.

---

[1] Two years before this, Wesley had published his abridged edition of "The Fool of Quality," in two volumes, 12mo.

[2] Original Letter.

[3] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore.

"My dear Mr. Fletcher spares no pains. I know not which is greater, his earnest desire for souls, or his patience in bearing with their infirmities and dulness. His preaching is exceeding lively; and our sacraments are more like those in the chapels of London than any I have seen since I left it. Yet, I find a great difference between the people here and those in Yorkshire: however, the Lord has little ones here also.

"Last Friday, after riding two hours in the rain, we came to a good congregation, where there was neither house nor church to cover us; but I have not seen more of the Yorkshire attention since I left that county, nor had a more solemn time; though we were under a wet cloud all the while, and our poor servant waiting for us, who brought us safe home by ten o'clock the same night. This is one of the old congregations which my husband has visited for years; and where he joined (in Society) sixty persons. Next Friday, we are to see them again, and he purposes to enquire into the state of those which remain. There are, in many parts about here, some serious hearers, and we wish them all to be brought into a regular discipline. My husband has been at near £500 expense in building a small Preaching-house, that, if he should be removed, they may have a fold to prevent them from being scattered. But were they joined (in Society) *now*, it would be far more likely to answer the end. On this subject we wish to have a little conversation with you.

"I am your affectionate servant,
"MARY FLETCHER."

Two months after this, Fletcher was temporarily disabled by an accident, mentioned in a long letter to Lady Mary Fitzgerald, from which the following is extracted:—

"MADELEY, *August* 28, 1782.

"MY HONOURED FRIEND,—The Lord has peculiar favours in store for your ladyship, and for me; the proof is, that we are *afflicted*. Have you been in a weak state of health? I have had the honour to drink of your cup. The influenza laid me down; and, when I was partly well, I broke my shin against a bench, in consequence of which I am confined by a bad leg to my bed, where I write this.

"You still complain of *vile self*. Let vile self be reduced to order, and, though he be a bad master, he will become *an excellent servant*. Do this, by letting the Lord, the Maker, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Lover of your soul, ascend upon the throne of your thoughts, will, and affections. Who deserves to engross them better than He does? Is not He your first Lord, your best Husband, your most faithful Friend, and your greatest Benefactor? Oh! allow Jehovah, the Supreme Being, to be to you what He deserves to be, *All in all.* One lively act of faith, one assent and consent to this delightful truth, that your Father, who is in heaven, loves you a thousand times more than you love your idol (for God's love is, like Himself, *infinite* and boundless), will set your heart at liberty, and even make it dance for joy. What, if to this ravishing consideration, you add the transporting truth, that the Son of God, fairer than the sons of men and brighter than the angels, has loved you unto death, to the death of the cross, and loves you still more than all your friends do, were their love collected into *one* heart, could you help thinking, with a degree of joyous gratitude, of such an instance of Divine condescension? No, your *vile self* would be *ennobled*, *raised*, *expanded*, and set at liberty by this evangelical thought. Self would be nobody; Emmanuel would be all in all. You would be so employed in praising your Father's mercy, and your Saviour's love and tenderness, that you would have but little time to speak either of *good or bad self.* When self is forgotten, *as nothing* before God, you put self in its proper place; and you make room for the heavenly Being, whose holy and happy existence you are to shadow out. If you have left off attending on the Princess,[1] attend on the Prince of Peace with double diligence.

---

[1] A term well understood by Methodists: a meeting of the most spiritual people who met in class.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, 1790, p. 391.

"Shall we ever have the honour of seeing you, my lady? My wife, who joins in respectful love and thanks to your ladyship, for your remembrance of her, says, she will do her best to render our cold house safe for you, if not convenient. You would have had a repeated invitation from us, if a concern for your health, heightened by the bad weather, had not checked our desires to have an opportunity of assuring you how much we are devoted to your service. But the roads and weather beginning to mend, we venture to offer you the best apartment in our hermitage. I wish it were large enough to take in dear Mrs. G——,[2] and our dear friends in St. James's Place; but we have only two small rooms; to which, however, you would be received with two enlarged hearts,—I mean those of your ladyship's obedient, devoted servants,

"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."[3]

How long Fletcher was laid aside from his public work there is no evidence to show. His position was somewhat trying, for the work was heavy, and Mr. Bayley, his curate, had been obliged to return to Wesley's school at Kingswood. This and other matters are referred to in the following letter to Charles Wesley:—

---

[1] Probably, Princess Elizabeth Caroline, the third daughter of George the Second, one of the most excellent of women. She died, in St. James's Palace, in 1787.

[2] Probably Mrs. Grinfield, "one of Cæsar's household," as Whitefield called her, an attendant at St. James's Palace.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 287.

"MADELEY, *December* 19, 1782.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I thank you for your hint about exemplifying the love of Christ and His Church. I hope we do. I was afraid, at first, to say much of the matter; but, having lived thirteen months in my new state, I can tell you, Providence has reserved a *prize* for me, and that my wife is far better to me than the Church to Christ, so that if the parallel fails, it will be on my side.

"Be so good as to peruse the enclosed sheets. Mr. De Luc, to whom they are addressed, is reader to the Queen, and the author of some volumes of Letters to her: he is a true philosopher. I flatter myself, he will present my letter to the Queen. Do you find anything improper in the addition I have made to my poem? I wish I were near you for your criticisms; you would direct me, both as a *poet* and a *Frenchman*.

"I have yet strength enough to do my parish duty without the help of a curate. O that the Lord would help me to do it acceptably and profitably! The colliers began to rise in this neighbourhood: happily the cockatrice's egg was crushed, before the serpent came out. However, I got many a hearty curse from the colliers, for the plain words I spoke on that occasion. I want to see days of power both *within* and *without;* but, meantime, I would follow closely my light in the narrow path.

"My wife joins me in respectful love to Mrs. Wesley and yourself; and, requesting an interest in your prayers for us, I remain, my dear Sir, your affectionate, obliged brother, servant, and son in the Gospel,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

The "poem," mentioned in this letter, was "La Grace et la Nature," which Fletcher had composed in Switzerland, and published in Geneva. He had now enlarged it, and wished to publish a second edition of it, and to dedicate the book to the Queen of King George the Third. This was done a few months before he died; but, previous to committing his sheets to the press, he submitted them to the criticism of Charles Wesley, Methodism's unequalled hymnologist.

This, however, was not the only poem on which Fletcher was now engaged. On November 30, 1782, the preliminaries of the peace with America were signed; and, on January 20, 1783, peace was concluded with France and Spain. The termination of the long and disastrous war gave no one greater joy than it did Fletcher. He celebrated it in another poem, written also in French, and dedicated to the Archbishop of Paris.[1] This was published, but is now extremely scarce. Fletcher enlarged it; and, in 1785, Mr. Gilpin translated it into English, and intended to dedicate his translation to the author; but, just as this English edition was being printed, Fletcher died, and the dedication, dated exactly a fortnight after Fletcher's death, was, "To the Honoured Mrs. Mary de la Flechere, of Madeley, in Shropshire." The title of the poem was, "An Essay upon the Peace of 1783. Dedicated to the Archbishop of Paris. Translated from the French of the Rev. J. Fletcher, late Vicar of Madeley. By the Rev. J. Gilpin, Vicar of Wrockwardine, Salop. London: Printed by R. Hindmarsh, 1785." 4to, 79 pp.

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 288.

Want of space renders it impossible to furnish extracts from this poetical production. In rhyme and rhythm, Fletcher, or, more probably, his translator, was far from perfect; but that the Vicar, bred among the inspiring scenery of Switzerland, was possessed of real poetic genius, there cannot be a doubt. His descriptions of a naval battle, and of a fight on land, and of the bombarding of Gibraltar, are very graphic. So also are his definitions of the passions which war too frequently evokes.

Though hardly worth mentioning, it may be stated, that the only thing published by Fletcher, in the year 1782, was the following: "A Race for Eternal Life: being an Extract from the Heavenly Footman. A Sermon on 1 Cor. ix. 24: written by the Author of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' By the Rev. Mr. Fletcher. London: printed by R. Hindmarsh." 12mo, 16 pp. Fletcher says:—

> "This extract is published,—1. To stir up lazy and inconsistent Arminian professors, who assert that we should work out our own salvation with all diligence, and yet neglect doing it. And, 2. To convince of partiality the contentious Calvinists, who quarrel with their brethren for preaching *consistently* the very same doctrine, which is *inconsistently* maintained by their orthodox teachers, among whom pious John Bunyan stands in the first rank."

---

[1] Fletcher's dedication is dated, "Madeley, Salop, January 28, 1784."

About this time, two young men were introduced to Fletcher, whom he helped to the utmost of his power, and who, soon afterwards, attained distinction, as clergymen of the Church of England.

One of these was Nathaniel Gilbert, the eldest son of Nathaniel Gilbert, Esq., Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua, and who formed the first Methodist Society in the West Indies. In 1759, he had requested Fletcher to accompany him to the Western Archipelago; but Fletcher had declined, on the ground that he had neither "sufficient zeal, nor grace, nor talents" for such missionary work. His son, Nathaniel, was sent to England at the age of seven (about the year 1761), and, three years later, was placed under the care of the Rev. Mr. Hatton, of Water's Upton, in Shropshire, where he acquired a knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages. On returning to Antigua, he found that the estate of his father was overwhelmed with debt, and that the subsistence of the family depended on a small jointure belonging to his mother. He came back to England; settled in the parish of Madeley; enjoyed the advantages of Fletcher's ministry and counsels; and devoted himself to God. On receiving episcopal ordination, the places of his ministerial labours were Bristol, London, Budworth, Sierra Leone, Aveley, and Bledlow. He was an eminently good and useful man; and peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, in 1807, in the forty-sixth year of his age.[1]

The other youth, who greatly benefited by Fletcher's example and advice, was Melville Horne, who, for a few years, was one of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers, and then was ordained for the ministry of the Church of England. Melville Horne was a remarkable man, of whom it would be an easy and pleasant task to write a more than ordinary biography. Suffice it to say here, that, a year after Fletcher's death, he became the officiating minister in Fletcher's church; that, in 1792, he and his friend Gilbert went as missionaries to Sierra Leone; that, on his return in 1794, he was appointed Chaplain of Magdalen Chapel, Bristol; and then became Vicar of Olney.[2] This is not the place to record his subsequent career of distinguished usefulness; but the testimony of such a man, concerning Fletcher, is worthy of being quoted. Many years after his first introduction to Fletcher, he wrote:—

---

[1] *Christian Observer*, 1807, pp. 768-772.
[2] Unpublished letters.

"On all my visits to Mr. Fletcher, I derived the highest pleasure and edification. I not only had the opportunity of hearing many excellent sermons, but of seeing him in the privacies of life; and I know not which most to venerate,—his public or his private character. Grave and dignified in his deportment and manners, he yet excelled in all the courtesies of the accomplished gentleman. In every company, he appeared as the least, the last, and the servant of all. From head to foot, he was clothed with humility; while the heavenly-mindedness of an angel shone from his countenance, and sparkled in his eyes. His religion was without labour, and without effort; for Christianity was not only his great business, but his very element and nature. As a mortal man, he doubtless had his errors and failings; but what they were, they who knew him best would find it difficult to say; for he appeared as an instrument of heavenly minstrelsy always attuned to the Master's touch.

"In every view, he was a great man, and entitled to rank in the very first class of ministers; but it was his *goodness* that raised him above all the ministers of his day.

"On my occasional visits to Madeley, I was struck with several things. Once, when preaching on Noah as a type of Christ, he was in the midst of a most animated description of the terrible day of the Lord, when he suddenly paused. Every feature of his expressive countenance was marked with painful feeling; and, striking his forehead with the palm of his hand, he exclaimed, 'Wretched man that I am! Beloved brethren, it often cuts me to the soul, as it does at this moment, to reflect, that, while I have been endeavouring, by the force of truth, by the beauty of holiness, and even by the terrors of the Lord, to bring you to walk in the peaceable paths of righteousness, I am, with respect to many of you who reject the Gospel, only tying millstones round your necks, to sink you deeper in perdition!' The whole congregation was electrified, and it was some time before he could resume his subject.

"On another occasion, after the morning service, he asked if any of the congregation could give him the address of a sick man whom he was desired to visit. He was answered, 'He is dead, Sir.' 'Dead! dead!' he exclaimed; 'another soul launched into eternity! What can I do for him now? Why, my friends, will you so frequently serve me in this manner? I am not informed you are ill till I find you dying, or hear that you are dead.' Then sitting down, he covered his head with his gown, and, when the congregation had retired, walked home crushed with sorrow.

"One New Year's Day, Gilbert and myself dined with him, as did also a pious young man and his wife. After he had entertained us with much pious and instructive conversation, as we all stood around the fire and were ready to separate, he took Gilbert's hand and mine and joined them together, and said, 'You two young men are united by blood, by friendship, and by your destination to the blessed service of the sanctuary.' Then, turning to the young man and his wife, he remarked, 'Do you also, whom God has joined in the tenderest of earthly bonds, join hands, and I will take that of my beloved wife.' This being done, he continued, 'And now what shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits? What blessings have we received! What mercies have followed us the last year! This is the first day of a new year. Let us give our whole soul to God. Let us start afresh on the road to immortality. Forgetting the things that are behind, let us press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' And then, lifting his eyes to heaven, he prayed for the whole of us most fervently and affectionately."[1]

After this account of the covenant service in Fletcher's vicarage, Mr. Horne proceeds to relate other anecdotes which came within his own personal knowledge. He writes:—

"In the contests of humility, kindness, and affection, it was impossible to surpass Mr. Fletcher. On one occasion, the Rev. Moseley Cheek had been preaching in his parish; and, on their way home to Madeley, in a dark night, and along a deep, dirty road, Mr. Fletcher carefully held the lantern to Mr. Cheek, while he himself walked through the mire. Mr. Cheek made fruitless attempts to take the lantern from him; Mr. Fletcher replying to his protests, 'What, my brother, have you been holding up the glorious light of the Gospel, and will you not permit me to hold this dim taper to your feet?'

"At another time, the Rev. Mr. Gilpin perceiving a funeral waiting at the church gate, took the surplice and commenced the service; but he had hardly got into the desk when Mr. Fletcher, who had been visiting a sick person, came into the church, and gently drawing away a lad who was officiating in the absence of the clerk, took his place. After the service was ended, he observed that he could not bear to see the place of an inferior servant of the Church improperly filled up without attempting to supply it himself with a greater degree of decorum and reverence.

"Once, when my coat was dusty with riding, he insisted on brushing it, but objected to let me perform the same office for himself. Mrs. Fletcher, who perceived our contest, said, with a smile, 'Then suffer me to do it; for I assure you, my dear, you need it as much as Mr. Horne.' 'If you please, my love,' was the reply, 'you shall do it, for you are a part of myself.'"[2]

"Some of these anecdotes," says Mr. Cox, "may, at first sight, appear too trivial for publication; but they are highly descriptive of Mr. Fletcher's general demeanour; and, as Rosseau observes, 'The physiognomy does not show itself in great features, nor the character of a man in great actions. It is in trifles that the natural disposition discovers itself.' "[1]

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 147.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 149.

While Fletcher was forming new friendships with young Nathaniel Gilbert and Melville Horne, his old friends were rapidly dying. His generous host, Mr. Charles Greenwood, of Stoke Newington, triumphantly exchanged mortality for eternal life on February 21, 1783, on which occasion Fletcher wrote the following to Mrs. Thornton :—

"MADELEY, *March* 3, 1783.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Yesterday, I received your melancholy joyful letter as I came from the sacrament, where the grace of God had armed me to meet the news. And is my merciful host gone to reap the fruit of his mercy to me ? I thought I should have been permitted to go first, and welcome him into everlasting habitations; but Providence has ordered it otherwise, and I am left behind to say, with you and dear Mrs. Greenwood, 'The Lord gave and has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' The glory with which Mr. Greenwood's setting sun was gilded, is the greatest comfort by which heaven could alleviate his loss. Let me die as he died, and let my last end be like his ! I was so affected by your account that I could not help reading part of your letter at church in the afternoon, and desiring all the congregation to join me in thanksgiving for the late mercies God has vouchsafed to my generous benefactor. On such occasions, let sighs be lost in praise, and repining in humble submission and thankful acquiescence. I hope dear Mrs. Greenwood mixes tears of joy with tears of sorrow. Who would not be landed on the other side of the stream of time if he were sure of such a passage ? Who would wish his best friend back on the shores of sorrow so triumphantly left by Mr. Greenwood ?

"So Mr. and Mrs. Perronet are no more; and Lazarus is still alive ! What scenes does this world afford ! But the most amazing is that of Emmanuel crucified, and offering US pardons and crowns of glory ! "[2]

Another letter, written three months after this, was addressed to John Valton, the Methodist itinerant, who preached at Cross Hall to the wedding party on the evening of Fletcher's marriage.

"MADELEY, *July*, 1783.

"Our dear friend's acceptable favour gave us much pleasure, though we have been so long in thanking him for it.

"Never did we imagine till lately how great your trial has been about the house at Birstal.[1] But how gracious is the Lord! How has He here paid you by the refreshing shower which has since distilled as the dew on the grass. O what comfortable accounts have reached us of the wonderful revival in your circuit.[2] In this my heart does indeed rejoice.

---

[1] Cox's "Life of Fletcher," p. 150.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 290.

"God is good unto us also. He has not left us without encouragement. For some time past, we have scarcely had a week in which one or more has not been set at liberty. But we are called, I believe, to leave them for a little while, and to spend a few weeks in Dublin. They complain of this, but the will of the Lord must be done. When He calls, even life itself must not be esteemed too dear.

"You will be thankful to hear that my best earthly friend continues in tolerable health, though neither of us is strong. We are more and more sensible of the lovingkindness of the Lord in casting our lot together. Every day helps us to praise Him more and more for His condescension and goodness to such unworthy worms. I speak thus freely to you because you were a witness of the beginning of our pilgrimage together. I see many professors, and many really in earnest; but, alas! very seldom any who can warm one's heart with the deep things of God. O for a deeper baptism of the Spirit! I want that promise *more fully* accomplished, 'I and my Father will come, and will make our abode with you.'

"Praying that the Lord may be with you all at the ensuing Conference, we remain, dear brother, your affectionate friends,

"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."[3][4]

The foregoing letter mentions an intended visit to Dublin. It has been already stated that Fletcher received an invitation from the Dublin Methodists to visit them in 1782; and that he was then obliged to decline their invitation. Now his way to Ireland seemed open. Mrs. Fletcher writes:—

"1783, August 5. Since May 22" [the date of the last entry in her journal], "a fever has been in the parish, which took off many whom we saw it our duty to attend. It brought eternity very near, and that always does me good. It came into our family, and Sally" [Lawrence] "was attacked with it; but God raised her up again in a wonderful manner. Soon after her recovery, Dr. Coke came, on his way from Dublin, and brought letters to each of us. We went to church, where the doctor preached. When we returned home, I followed my dear to his study, and told him if he saw it his call to go to Dublin, I saw it mine to go with him. Since that day, we have been preparing for our journey. My dear husband's health is not very good. What the Lord will do with us I know not. We are, however, ready for setting off."

---

[1] The Methodist meeting-house, erected, under the auspices of John Nelson, about the year 1751. The trouble, at this time, arose out of the demand of the trustees to elect, after Wesley's death, their own preachers, and to order them to preach in Birstal chapel twice every Sunday, every Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Good Friday, and also every Thursday night. (See "Life and Times of Wesley," vol. iii., pp. 373-383.)

[2] See an account of this remarkable work of God in the "Life and Labours of the Rev. John Valton, edited by Joseph Sutcliffe, A.M., 1830," pp. 104-114.

[3] *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 598.

[4] It is said that, after his marriage, Fletcher, when writing to his *friends*, always subscribed his letters "*John and Mary Fletcher*." (See "Six Letters of the late Rev. J. Fletcher. Bath, 1788." 12mo, 20 pp.)

Five weeks after this, Mrs. Fletcher wrote again in her journal as follows:—

"1783, September 12, William Street, Dublin. This day of our birth calls for solemn praise. I say OUR birth, because, as far as we can learn, my dear Mr. Fletcher was born on the same day ten years before me.

"With the prayers and blessings of many of our friends, we set off from Madeley on Tuesday, August 12. At night, we were affectionately received by Mrs. Glynne, of Shrewsbury, whose love to the children of God does not grow cold. My dear husband preached on the danger of being *ashamed of the Gospel.*

"The next day, we pursued our journey as far as Llangollen, in Wales, where we abode all night. Enquiring, as we walked about the town, whether they had any praying people among them, the poor things answered us in the best manner they could, and said, 'Yes, Sir, there are some people who pray in houses at the other end of the town, but we know not what they be. This very night a man is to preach in their chapel.' We went to the place, and found a few poor people gathered in a building which, I believe, was part of an old house. The preacher seemed very earnest, but we could not understand a word he said, except *ogoniant* and *gwaed*—glory and blood; which, with much emphasis, he often repeated. After we were returned to our inn, a few, who could understand English, came to us, and desired my dear to give them a sermon in the morning, which he did, on these words, 'This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He hath given us commandment.' It was a good time, and several were present who understood English.

"We then sent off for Conway, and, on Friday afternoon, reached Holyhead. Mr. Fletcher was very poorly, and a swelling on his face now broke, which gave him much inconvenience; but, on Saturday morning, we embarked. Mr. Fletcher was not affected by the sea, but I was very ill. About one o'clock on Sunday morning, we cast anchor three miles from Dublin; and, at five, reached the Hotel on Dublin Quay.

"We now abide with our hospitable friends, Mr. and Mrs. Smyth, in William Street, and have seen much of the Lord's hand in bringing us hither. My dear husband has been favoured with much unction in preaching the word. The present (Methodist) preachers in Dublin, brothers Rutherford and Jackson, are simple, pious men, and respect that command, 'In honour preferring one another.' They heartily rejoice in the message my dear husband delivers among them. I feel much liberty in meeting the classes. Here are a few truly athirst for full salvation. Our kind and generous host and hostess allow us all freedom in their house, for the glory of God, and the good of His people; and, as their servants also are pious, upright persons, we can here worship with them in calm and brotherly love."

Before referring to the testimonies of other persons, it may be best to complete what Mrs. Fletcher has to say concerning this evangelistic visit to the sister island. She writes:—

"Madeley, *October* 30. On the 7th of this month, we left Dublin, and embarked for Holyhead. In the night, the wind grew high. My husband, myself, and also Sally, were so ill, we could scarce speak, or look towards each other. Since our return, I have closely examined what I have lost or got in these last three months. I praise the Lord that we went to Dublin, and that for various reasons. There are some there with whom I found much fellowship; at whose feet I sat, and, I trust, learned many useful lessons. My dear Mr. Fletcher preached in several places besides the (Methodist) Preaching-house in White-Friars-street, both to the French and English, and we had some remarkable proofs that he was called there by God.

"Since our return, my dear husband has taken another journey of about two hundred miles,[1] from which he has suffered a good deal. His face is not yet well; but the unwearied patience, wherewith he goes through all, is to me a continual lesson.

"*November* 12. We see another anniversary of our blessed union, and are yet more happy, and more tender towards each other; and, what is better, our souls get nearer God. We are more spiritual, and live more for eternity."[2]

Henry Moore, Wesley's sturdy Itinerant, was appointed to the Dublin Circuit, three years after Fletcher's visit, and, in 1818, wrote:—

"Never did I see such deep impressions made on the people of Dublin as by the truly evangelical labours of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, except, perhaps, in the very short visits of Mr. Wesley. A great revival of pure religion followed in the Dublin Society. That Society had usually consisted of about 500 persons, but it soon increased to upwards of 1000, and has never since fallen below that number. Such longing after entire conformity to the Son of God I never beheld. How wide this sacred influence might have extended, who can tell, if a poor sectarian spirit had not limited Mr. Fletcher's labours. On his arrival in Dublin, his host, Mr. Smyth, a distinguished and most respectable gentleman, applied to the rector of St. Andrew's Parish, in which he lived, to allow Mr. Fletcher to preach in his church, and this was immediately granted. The church was crowded to excess. Mr. Fletcher's text was, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' His earnestness and power astonished the congregation, some of whom seemed to doubt if he were not more than human. But, alas! it was soon known that he preached on the evening of that same day at the Methodist Preaching-house; and the pulpits of the churches were immediately closed against him, with the exception of that of the French Church. The first time he preached there, his text was Hebrews x. 32, when he brought before the congregation the faith of their ancestors. When some of them were asked, 'Why did you go to hear Mr. Fletcher, when you could not understand a word he said?' they answered, 'We went to look at him, for heaven seemed to beam from his countenance.'"[1]

---

[1] This was a journey to Bristol, whither he escorted his hostess, Mrs. Smyth, Lady Mary Fitzgerald, and the eldest daughter of the Rev. Edward Smyth. ("Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon," vol. ii., p. 195.)

[2] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore, p. 155.

Mr. Henry Brooke,[2] who took a leading part in inviting Fletcher to visit Dublin, wrote:—

"1783, *September* 6. The same grace and power which attend Mr. Fletcher's pulpit lectures, and gather innumerable crowds of hungering, thirsting souls to flock to his ministry, also attend his conversation in private. He seems never—no, never—for a moment, to turn his eye from the one great object of our faith and love; and he continually stirs up all around him to love and praise. He appears to live and breathe nothing else."

In another letter, to his father, Mr. Brooke observed:—

"I wish it were in my power to convey to you the substance and energy of those precious and excellent discourses, with which we are frequently favoured from Mr. Fletcher. His words are living sparks, rushing from the furnace of divine love glowing in his heart."

Mr. Brooke, in a letter to the Rev. J. Gilpin, the translator of Fletcher's "Portrait of St. Paul," remarked:—

"When Mr. Fletcher was about to leave us, knowing the scanty pittance he received from his parish, we thought it but an act of common honesty to refund him the expense he had been at in coming to Dublin, and to bear his charges back again to Madeley. Accordingly, after he had preached on the last evening of his stay among us, the stewards and trustees united to press his acceptance of a small purse, not as a present, but as a debt justly due to him. But he firmly and absolutely refused it. At length, being very urgent with him and importunate to an excess, he took the purse in his hand, and said, 'Do you really force it upon me? Must I accept it? Is it entirely mine? and may I do what I please with it?' 'Yes, yes,' we all replied. 'God be praised then! God be praised!' cried he, raising his eyes towards heaven. 'What a mercy is here! I heard some of you complaining that your Poor's Fund was never so low before; take this purse; God has sent it to you; raised it among yourselves; and bestowed it upon your poor. You cannot deny me; it is sacred to them. God be praised! I thank you, I heartily thank you, my dear kind brethren.'"[1]

---

[1] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore, p. 154.

[2] Mr. Brooke is described, in Wesley's "Last Will and Testament," as a "Painter."

A number of other anecdotes respecting this memorable visit, all more or less authentic, might be inserted; but enough has been said to show that it must always be one of the great events in the history of Methodism in Dublin.

Soon after the return to Madeley of Fletcher and his wife, they received the following, hitherto unpublished letter, signed by one hundred and fifty-one members of the Dublin Methodist Society, the signature of "Henry Brooke" standing first.

"1783, *October*.

"REV. AND VERY DEAR SIR AND MADAM,—Your kindness in accepting our united invitation, your labour of love in crossing the sea to visit us, and your spending body and soul for our profit while among us, demand a return of acknowledgment and gratitude, which we find ourselves, jointly and severally, as unable to express as to repay.

"Confession of our debt is the utmost extent of our ability. As for reward, we must call upon Him to answer for us, who has already paid the mighty debt due by the whole world. May He, then, even that Master, the sound of whose feet was heard behind you, and the power of whose Spirit clothed your word in private and in public,—may He abundantly reward both your bodies and souls, and, according to the measure you have meted out, measure to you again a hundred-fold, pressed down, shaken together, and running over into your own bosoms in time and eternity.

"Your liberality to the sick poor, in the generous donation of twenty-five guineas, has gladdened the hearts of numbers, besides those who are partakers of your alms; for you have nobly honoured the Lord by your free ministry, and set your seal to His Word with your substance. May you be watered again and again abundantly for it!

---

[1] "Life of Mr. Henry Brooke," by Isaac D'Olier, LL.D., pp. 102—121.

"We can only pray for the prosperity of your labours where the adorable providence of God has cast your lot in His vineyard; and hope that the Lord may give the people to see and know (in mercy and not in judgment) that a prophet has been among them.

"Lastly, we entreat that, after the example of St. Paul, you will remember us all in your daily and nightly addresses to the throne of grace, that the precious seed, which has been sown, may bring forth its hundred-fold increase, to our joint happiness in the kingdom of God."

In the month of November, a reply was sent to this, from which the following extract is taken:—

"MADELEY, *November*, 1783.

"To the Society in Dublin.

"To all the dear Brethren, who, after kindly inviting John and Mary Fletcher, patiently bearing with them and their infirmities, and entertaining them in the most hospitable manner, have added, to all their former favours, that of thanking them for their most pleasant and profitable journey.

"We had felt shame enough under the sense of your kindness and patience towards us, and of our unprofitableness towards you, when at Dublin. We owed you the letter of thanks you have gratuitously sent to us. But in all things, you will have the pre-eminence, and we are glad to drink the cup of humility at your feet If your profuse liberality toward *us* abounded to the comfort of our poor brethren, we doubly rejoice on *your* account, and on *theirs*.

"When we see so many of your dear names, we rejoice in hope that they are enrolled on the list of the dear people, whom our great High Priest bears, not on the breastplate as Aaron, but on His bleeding hands, and in His very heart, which is the overflowing and ever-flowing fountain of divine and brotherly love. Let our worthless names still find a place in your memory, when you remember your brethren distant in the flesh, but near in the Spirit. Among such, vouchsafe to reckon your very affectionate and truly obliged servants in Christ,

"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."

To their Irish host, William Smyth, Esq., Fletcher wrote as follows:—

"MADELEY, *November*, 1783.

"DEAR SIR,—The many and great favours with which you loaded us, during our long stay under your hospitable roof, have been, are now, and, we trust, ever shall be deeply engraven on our hearts. You united, for us, Irish hospitality, English cordiality, and French politeness. And now, Sir, what shall we say?

"You are our generous benefactor, and we are your affectionate, though unprofitable servants. In one sense, we are on a level with those to whom you show charity in the streets: we can do nothing but pray for you and yours. You kindly received us for Christ's sake; may God receive you freely for His sake also! You bore with our infirmities; the Lord bear with yours! You let your servant serve us; the Lord give all His servants and His angels charge concerning you! You gave us a most comfortable apartment, next your own chamber; the Lord grant you eternal rest with Himself in His heavenly mansions! You fed us with the richest food; may the Giver of every perfect gift fit you for a place at His table, and may you rank there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! You gave us wines; may you drink, with Christ Himself, the fruit of the vine, new in your Father's kingdom!"[1]

It has been asserted, that, "towards the close of his life," Fletcher "abstained entirely from wine and strong drink;"[2] but the evidence in favour of this is dubious, and, certainly, the last sentence of the foregoing letter seems to disprove it. Throughout the whole of his life, he was exceedingly temperate in eating and drinking; but it may fairly be doubted whether Fletcher was ever a "teetotaler."[3] It is a curious fact, however, that in this very year, 1783, he wrote a pamphlet bearing upon the subject of drunkenness and other matters, which he intended to be published, but which, I believe, never was. It was sent to "Mr. Hindmarsh, printer, in Baker's Court, Holborn Bars, London," together with a letter of instructions as to the printing of it, dated, "Madeley, November 20, 1783." When printed, Mr. Hindmarsh was requested to send, as soon as possible, a copy to every member of Parliament. The title was, "Three National Grievances,—the Increase of Taxes, the Hardships of Unequal Taxation, and the Continual Rise of the Poor's Rates: with the Causes and Remedies of these Evils: Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature, in a Letter to the Right Honorable Lord John Cavendish, Chancellor of the

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 293.

[2] *Local Preachers' Magazine*, 1853, p. 172.

[3] Jonathan Crowther, President of the Methodist Conference in 1819, says, in his unpublished autobiography:—

"Mr. Yates, of Madeley, told me that, one cold, snowy, frosty day, when Mr. Fletcher called at his house, as he was sallying out to visit his parishioners, he asked him to take a little punch, which was then upon the table, after dinner. Mr. Fletcher consented, but said, 'First, let us ask a blessing: it makes it twice as good.'"

Exchequer, and one of the Lords of the Treasury. London: November, 1783."

The temptation is strong to insert this remarkable production *in extenso;* but to do so, in a chapter like the present, would be an inconvenient excrescence; besides, want of space makes it impossible. Suffice it to say, that, under the heading of the first "Grievance," Fletcher argues, that, the decrease of the national revenue, and consequent increase of the national taxation, were occasioned by "the amazing progress of smuggling." He says, "No one can deny that vast quantities of foreign brandy, rum, gin, tobacco, snuff, tea, wines of all sorts, and a variety of other articles, are fraudulently imported;" and that these, on the sea-coast, are sold at "half the price which they cost the conscientious merchant." "Many thousands of lawless men are perpetually forming or executing schemes, to defraud the Government, and reduce us to beggary." Fletcher says, it was once his opinion that "smuggling might be prevented, by the combined services of the army and navy; but," he adds, "as most of the inferior Custom House officers on the coast, with £50 a year, live in splendour, and as the evil is deeply rooted, I am now convinced that the only way to check it is to take off the duties, to lessen the number of officers in both Customs and Excise, and to advance the salaries of those who are retained. If I prove that, by lessening the duties, the revenue will be increased and smuggling suppressed, there can be no objection to the adoption of the plan proposed." Fletcher enters into many details to establish his theory; and thus, long before the days of Peel and Gladstone, took the part of *free-traders.*

His chapter on *unequal taxation* must be passed; but some of his statements, in the *third,* deserve notice. He insists that—

> "The continual increase of the Poor Rates is occasioned by the corrupted morals of the lower classes of the people, who are seduced into idleness and neglect of their families, in the public-houses to be met with at every turn. There are also multitudes of *private* retailers of *smuggled* spirits, who, by enticing their neighbours into drunkenness, entail ruin on them and their families. In some parishes, the number of these lawless retailers far exceeds that of the publicans. But to speak only of *licensed* houses, what multitudes of these are found all over

England! In some places, almost every fifth house is one of those nurseries of vice."

Terrible is the picture which Fletcher draws, respecting the ruinous consequences of drunkenness; and his arguments would help Sir Wilfrid Lawson to make a most effective speech on "Local Option" in the House of Commons.

"If," continues Fletcher, "these paltry public-houses are the bane of the nation, let the legislative power interfere in England, as it has done in Holland. Let two-thirds of these nuisances be suppressed; and by raising the licenses of the others, so as to indemnify the revenue, let the law put it out of the power of the *idle poor* to set up these petty schools of idleness and vice. Then people of character will no longer be afraid to become publicans."

In a "postscript," Fletcher refers to a pamphlet which states that—

"Sixty thousand of the ablest young men in the kingdom, and one hundred thousand horses, are employed in smuggling, whilst one hundred thousand women and children make it their business to hawk about the country the articles which the men have smuggled. If these one hundred and sixty thousand people were employed in fishing, agriculture, spinning, etc., their labour would amount annually to £2,464,000, to which must be added the sum of £1,820,000, the cost of keeping the one hundred thousand horses uses by smugglers. . . . The Dutch catch fish, on our coasts, to the yearly amount of one million sterling. . . . Fishing and smuggling never flourish together. . . . In Scotland, there are upwards of ten thousand private stills," etc., etc.

Thus Fletcher, the polemical divine, turned social reformer; and his efforts to correct the crying evils of the age were not confined to the employment of his pen. In his own parish, there were eighteen public houses,—all of them "nurseries for sin, particularly on Sunday evenings." He had long desired to correct these abuses; but had seldom been favoured with the services of a churchwarden willing to second his endeavours. Now he had one, who was resolved to act according to the oath he had taken. Fletcher visited several of these dens of iniquity every Sunday, and all of them in their turn. In every one of them, he bore a faithful testimony against their wickedness; and, in some instances, his efforts were attended with much success.[1]

---

[1] "Letter to Mons. H. L. De la Flechere," 1786, p. 16.

At this period, trade was bad, taxes were crushing, and corn was dear. King George the Third, in his speech to "My Lords and Gentlemen," the members of the two Houses of Parliament, remarked, "The scarcity, and consequent high price of corn, requires your instant interposition." Corn was scarce, and, in many instances, it was bought and hoarded by execrable speculators, for the purpose of raising the price of it, and increasing their own blood-soaked profits. Fletcher was indignant, and proposed the formation of an association of persons of unblemished character:—

"1. To prosecute legally all engrossers and forestallers of the necessaries of life.

"2. If there be any laws against those who cause an artificial scarcity, by monopolizing the necessaries of life,—to apply to the magistrates to put such laws in force against the offenders,—and, if, through fear or favour, the magistrates refuse, to apply for redress to Quarter Sessions, or to the Court of King's Bench.

"3. That the members of the Association subscribe, according to their ability, towards defraying the expense of detecting, and legally prosecuting the offenders."

Fletcher added:—

"If such a plan is entered upon, and carried on in this county" (Salop), "I will gladly become a subscriber of a guinea, *provided no illegal steps be taken by the associates.*"

This is copied from an unpublished manuscript in Fletcher's own handwriting. The following also is taken from another original manuscript, written by Fletcher:—

"It is proposed—

"1. That Sunday Schools be set up in this parish, for such children as are employed all the week, and for those whose education has been neglected.

"2. That, in those schools, children shall be taught to read and write, and shall be instructed in the principles of morality and piety.

"3. That, in the Dale, in Madeley, and in Madeley Wood, there shall be a school for boys, and another for girls,—six schools in all.

"4. That £20 be raised, by subscription, for this charity; namely, £14 for the salaries of six teachers; which, at the rate of one shilling, per time, for fifty-two Sunday afternoons, excepting Easter-Day and Whit-Sunday, will amount to fifty shillings each teacher. The remaining £6 shall be laid out in tables, benches, books, paper, pens, and ink.

"5. That, if the expenses incurred should run higher than is here supposed, the subscribers shall be acquainted with it, and their charity shall be again solicited.

"6. That, whosoever shall subscribe a guinea towards this charity shall be a director of it.

"7. That, at a parish meeting, two treasurers shall be appointed to ask and to receive the contributions of those who shall be willing to encourage this charity.

"8. That, three or four inspectors shall be appointed to visit these schools, to see that the children attend regularly, and that the masters do their duty by the children, and to make their report to the directors.

"9. That, a book shall be provided by the treasurers, in which they, or a secretary whom they shall appoint, shall yearly enter the sums subscribed, and the manner in which they are laid out; and that such book shall be laid before the subscribers when they shall desire it.

"10. That, another book shall be provided, in which the names of the masters and the scholars, belonging to each school, shall be entered.

"11. And lastly, that, to encourage emulation, at a solemn visitation of these schools, once or twice a year, some premium shall be given to the children who distinguish themselves by their assiduity and improvement."

This was rather elaborate legislation for the administration of a charity fund of £20 a year; but money, in 1783, was scarce, and the Sunday School institution was then in its infancy.

For some years, Fletcher had had a school at Madeley, which he himself taught every day; and he had also established a similar school in Madeley Wood. Now he commenced his Sunday Schools, being, in this respect, almost contemporaneous with Raikes at Gloucester.

"Three hundred children were soon gathered, whom he took every opportunity of instructing, by regular meetings, for some time before the schools were opened; and these meetings he attended to the very last Thursday before his fatal illness. He gave the children little hymn-books; and pointed them to some friend or neighbour, who would teach them the hymns, and instruct them to sing. Many of the little creatures would scarcely allow themselves time to eat or sleep, for the desire they had of learning their lessons. In every meeting, after inquiring who had made the greatest proficiency, he never forgot to distinguish it by a little reward."

"His proposals to the parish were received with the greatest unanimity. Many, both of the rich and trading people, lent their helping hand, not only to defray the expense of teachers, but to raise a very convenient school-house in Coalbrookdale."[1]

---

[1] "Letter to Mons. H. L. De la Flechere, 1786, pp. 17 and 18.

The "Proposals" were prefaced with a statement of "the advantages likely to arise from Sunday Schools," which was as follows:—

> "Our parochial and national depravity turns upon two hinges,—the *profanation* of the Lord's day, and the *immorality* which flows from neglecting the education of children. Till these two great inlets of wickedness are stopped, we must expect to see our workhouses full of aged parents forsaken by their prodigal children; of wives deserted by their faithless husbands; or of the wretched offspring of lewd women, and idle and drunken men. Nay, we may expect to see the jails, and even the gallows, stocked with unhappy wretches, ready to fall a sacrifice to the safety of their neighbours, and the penal laws of their country.
>
> "Persons concerned for the welfare of the next generation, and well-wishers to the Church and State, have already set us a fine example in Stroud, Gloucester, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, and in several country parishes. They have attempted to remedy these evils by setting up Sunday Schools, which, by keeping children from corrupting one another, by promoting their attendance on Divine worship, and by laying the first principles of useful knowledge in their minds, and of true piety in their hearts,—bid fair for a public reformation of manners; and seem well calculated to nip in the bud the vices of *ignorance and impiety*, so common among the lower and more numerous classes of the people."[1]

It may be added, that the last productions of Fletcher's pen were an unfinished catechism, to be used in his Sunday Schools; prayers to be read by the children; and "Hints" to the teachers. Among the last mentioned, were instructions respecting the correction of any child "guilty of lying, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, stealing, fighting, or disobedience;" and recommendations that the teachers should "attend the scholars to Divine worship"; that they should "not break up too early in the evening, *that* being the time in which children are most likely to run into temptation;" and that "pious persons" should be induced to "visit and interrogate the children, in order that the whole might be carried on as a business sanctified by the Word of God, by prayer, and by Christian admonition."[2]

It would not be difficult to enlarge on facts and principles such as these; but the intelligent reader can do this himself.

---

[1] "Letter to Mons. H. L. De la Flechere," 1786, p. 22

[2] *Ibid*, p. 63.

Before leaving the year 1783, one more incident must be introduced. At the close of the year, the celebrated Rev. Henry Venn visited Fletcher, at Madeley, and wrote:—

> "Mr. Fletcher is a genius, and a man of fire—all on the stretch to do good—to lose not a day, not an hour. He is married to a lady worthy of him, Miss Bosanquet, a lady with whom I was acquainted twenty-nine years ago. She was then sixteen, and bred up in all the pride of life; her father being one of the chief merchants of London. By the grace of God, she, at that time, renounced the world, and gave up herself to the Lord. Since then, she has bred up seventy-four destitute young girls for service, and seen them placed out to her satisfaction; and, instead of dressing, visiting, and conforming to all the vain and expensive customs of the world, she has been wholly employed in doing good. I left this happy house as Cecil, Secretary to Queen Elizabeth, left Bernard Gilpin's, saying, 'There dwells as much happiness as can be known on earth.'"[1]

---

[1] "Life of Rev. Henry Venn," p. 377.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LAST DAYS ON EARTH.

1784—1785.

FLETCHER took a profound interest, not only in Sunday Schools, which were being opened in various places, but in an institution which has long been the greatest of which the Methodists can boast. In 1783, Dr. Coke and a few of his friends drew up "A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen." This curious and most interesting document is too long to be inserted here. Suffice it to say, there is reason to believe that Fletcher was one of Coke's counsellors. It has been already stated that, in the summer of 1783, the Doctor, on his way from Dublin, called at Madeley, and preached in Fletcher's church. Soon after this, Fletcher and his wife went to Dublin; and now, at the beginning of the year 1784, Coke forwarded to Fletcher the aforesaid "Plan," and a list of his missionary subscribers, twenty-six in number, seven of whom resided in Dublin. Is it chimerical to suppose that the formation of this Missionary Society was a subject of conversation between Coke and Fletcher, when the former was at Madeley, and that it was mainly through Fletcher's influence that so many of its first subscribers were Dublin Methodists? It is a curious fact that neither of the Wesleys appeared in the list of contributors, the reason perhaps of which might be that they had not been consulted in drawing up the "Plan." Fletcher, however, subscribed £2 2*s*. 0*d*. of the first year's income, which amounted to £66 3*s*. 0*d*., and to him Coke sent the "Plan" and the report, and also the following letter appended :—

"Near PLYMOUTH, *January* 6, 1784.

"MY VERY DEAR SIR,—Lest *Mr. Parker* should neglect to send you one of our Plans for the establishing of foreign Missions, I take the liberty of doing it. Ten subscribers more, of two guineas per annum, have favoured me with their names. If *you* can get a few subscribers more, we shall be obliged to you.

"We have now a very wonderful outpouring of the Spirit in the West of Cornwall. I have been obliged to make a winter campaign of it, and preach here and there out of doors.

"I beg my affectionate respects to Mrs. Fletcher. I entreat you to pray for

"Your most affectionate Friend and Brother,
"THOMAS COKE."

At this period, Fletcher was engaged in the last of his literary works. The following, hitherto unpublished letter, may serve as an introduction to the essays Fletcher was now writing. It was addressed to the "Rev. Mr. Bouverot, Geneva;" and, though without date, was evidently written a few days before Fletcher's memorable visit to Dublin:—

"The Society of Christian Philosophers, which you mention, seems, in this day, to be a useful Institution. The most redoubtable attacks upon religion come from our modern Sadducees, who say there is neither angel nor spirit; and the famous Dr. Priestly openly maintains that we have no soul, or, at least, that it is no other than the animal spirits. It may be, therefore, that God, who never leaves Himself without witnesses, has permitted this Society for the maintenance of a metaphysical doctrine so opposite to that of materialism. 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.'

"A Swedish gentleman, called Baron Swedenborg,[1] published many pieces in England, and declared he had conversed with angels and spirits for more than forty years, and that with as much familiarity as with men. Some of his works have been translated into English. There is one, of which I have the original Latin by me, entitled, 'Mirabilia Coeli et Inferni,' and which I mean to send you as soon as I shall find a convenient opportunity. It is certain, if believers were more detached from earthly things, and more concentred in Christ by faith, they would converse with angels and with the spirits of the departed saints, as the Patriarchs and first Christians were accustomed to do. There would, indeed, in this, be some danger of following after piety, with a view to such an advantage, through a species of curiosity, which, if it ought not to be called the *back door*, yet would not deserve to be entitled the *front*, which consists in an humble faith disengaged from sense and from all self-seeking," etc., etc.

---

[1] Swedenborg died in 1772.

"I have not yet had leisure to cast my eyes over my 'Portrait of St. Paul.' Next week, at the invitation of many who love the Word of God, I mean to make a tour into Ireland, from whence I propose returning before winter. Mr. Wesley, who is eighty years of age, is now on a tour in the Low Countries, where he preaches, even at Amsterdam.

"Assist me to bless God, who has sustained me hitherto, and who is my light and my salvation in Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever! Remember me before God in your prayers, as I have a continual remembrance of you in mine."

Fletcher's bold speculation, respecting the possibility of conversing with angels and the spirits of departed saints, may be passed in silence. The reader's attention must now be asked to the famous Dr. Priestley.

This remarkable man was born at Fieldhead, near Leeds, in 1733. While a student at the Dissenting Academy, kept by Dr. Ashworth, at Daventry, he became an Arian. His subsequent career need not here be traced. It is enough to say, that, about the year 1767, while he was the minister of a large congregation of Dissenters at Leeds, he embraced Socinianism; and that, about 1781, he wrote and published his "History of the Corruptions of Christianity,"—some of the teachings of which work Fletcher felt it his duty to refute. Dr. Priestley died at Philadelphia, in the United States of America, in 1804.

It has been already stated, that, early in the year 1785, Fletcher published a second and enlarged edition of his poem, entitled, "La Grace et la Nature." At the end of that work, the following advertisement was inserted: "Prêt à être publié en Anglois: A Rational Vindication of the Catholic Faith, respecting the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: being the First Part of a Scriptural Vindication of Christ's Divinity. Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley."

The Rev. Joseph Benson, the quondam tutor of Lady Huntingdon's Trevecca College, when Fletcher was its president, says this "Rational Vindication" was left by Fletcher "not quite finished;" which assertion seems to clash with Fletcher's own advertisement just given. There can be no doubt it was as finished as Fletcher meant it to be; though not as complete as Mr. Benson thought it ought to be, and as he himself tried to make it. In addition to this, however, Fletcher began a second essay, entitled, "Socinianism

Unscriptural; or, the Prophets and Apostles vindicated from the Charge of holding the Doctrine of Christ's mere Humanity: being the Second Part of a Vindication of His Divinity. Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley." The first of these was intended to be an answer to Priestley's assertion that "the doctrine of the Trinity is irrational;" and the second to refute his equally unfounded dogma, that, the doctrine of Christ's "divinity has no proper foundation in the Old Testament,—the prophets speaking of the Messiah only as a man like themselves;" nor in the "New Testament,—the Apostles never giving our Lord any higher title than that of a man approved of God." In Mr. Benson's opinion, both of the essays were left unfinished; and it is certain that neither of them was published in Fletcher's lifetime. Rightly or wrongly, Mr. Benson—a very able theologian—undertook, after Fletcher's death, to write supplements to both, and then published them; and these irrefutable productions of Mr. Benson's pen have, ever since 1818, when he was the Methodist Connexional Editor, been improperly incorporated in Fletcher's "Collected Works." Mr. Benson's additions to Fletcher's essays are invaluable; but they ought, in fairness to both authors, to be published separately. On this subject, however, nothing more need be added. Fletcher's replies to Priestley, which were printed a few years subsequent to his death,[1] were revised by Wesley, who writes, in his Journal:—

"1784, Saturday, March 27. I went to Madeley; and, at Mr. Fletcher's desire, revised his letters to Dr. Priestley. I think there is hardly another man in England so fit to encounter him.—Sunday, 28. Notwithstanding the severe weather, the church was more than filled. I preached on part of the Epistle (Heb. ix. 13, etc.); in the afternoon, on 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation;' and I believe God applied it to many hearts."

---

[1] The titles were:—1. "A Rational Vindication of the Catholic Faith: being the First Part of a Vindication of Christ's Divinity; inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, by J. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. Left imperfect by the Author, and now *revised* and *finished*, at Mrs. Fletcher's request, by Joseph Benson, Hull." 12mo, 223 pp. No date, but published in 1788 or 1789. The work consists of fourteen chapters, only four of which were written by Fletcher. The remaining ten were Mr. Benson's productions.

2. "Socinianism Unscriptural; or, the Prophets and Apostles vindicated from the Charge of holding the Doctrine of Christ's *mere Humanity:* being the Second Part of a Vindication of His Divinity: inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, by the late Rev. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop. To which is added, a Demonstration of the want of Common Sense in the New Testament Writers, etc., etc., in a Series of Letters to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, by Joseph Benson. Birmingham: 1791." 12mo, 239 pp. Fletcher's part of the volume occupies 118 pages.

Never has there been a time when there was more need of essays like those of Fletcher than that which is now passing. Socinianism, in various shapes, even among many who think themselves orthodox, is rampant; and the Methodist Book Committee would render incalculable service to the cause of Christian truth, by publishing in a separate form, and at as cheap a price as possible, Fletcher's two unanswerable replies to the redoubtable Dr. Priestley.

In his "Expostulatory Letter," Fletcher writes:—

"While you invite archdeacons and bishops to defend their church and the divinity of their Saviour, may the voice of a poor country vicar be heard amidst the groans of the press which repeats your challenges? Will not your sense of honour feel too great a disappointment in seeing so mean a person step forth to present you with an expostulatory letter, and to break a spear with you, on the very ground where you think yourself invincible,—philosophy, reason, and common sense?

"Conscious of the variety of your learning, and the greatness of your reputation, I apologize for my boldness, by observing, that the Church is my mother; that the feeblest child has a right to cry out when his mother is stabbed to the heart; and that, when the Divine crown of our Lord is publicly struck at, the least of believers may show his astonishment at the antichristian deed.

"When the Socinians of the last century said that it was impossible to believe God and man were united in the person of our Lord, the Catholics replied, it was as easy to believe that God and man make one Christ, as to believe that the immortal soul and the mortal body are one man. And Dr. Sherlock added, that the best way for the Socinians to set aside this argument against the mystery of our Lord's incarnation, was to deny the union of soul and body, because they could not understand it; and openly to maintain, that man is a body without a soul, a compound of mere matter.

"When that judicious divine dropped this hint, he little thought that some philosophers of our day would be so desperately bent upon divesting Christ of His Divine glory, that they would be content to die like dogs, without leaving any surviving part of themselves, so that they might win the day against the Catholic Church, and the divinity of our Lord.

"I am sorry to observe that you have the dangerous honour to be at the head of these bold philosophers. Dr. Berkeley was so singular as to deny the existence of matter. According to his doctrine, there is nothing but spirit in the world, and matter exists only in our ideas. As a rival of his singularity, you run into the opposite extreme; you annihilate our souls; you turn us into mere machines; we are nothing but matter; and if you allow us any spirit, it is only such as can be distilled like spirits of wine. Thus, if we believe you both, being ground not only to atoms but to absolute nonentity between the two millstones of your preposterous and contrary mistakes, we have neither form nor substance, neither body nor soul!

"Glad am I, Sir, that when you made so free with the souls of men you did not pass your philosophical sponge over the existence of the Father of spirits, the great Soul which gives life and motion to the universe. But, though you spare the Father's dignity, you attack the Son's divinity; you deny the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost; and, by hasty strides, you carry us back to a dwarf, mongrel Christianity, made up of materialism, Judaism, and the baptism of John.

"To gain this inglorious end, in your 'History of the Corruptions of Christianity' you collect the capital errors invented by fallen Christians in the corrupt ages of Christianity; then, taking some of the most precious Gospel truths, you blend them with these errors, and rendering them all equally odious, you turn them promiscuously out of the Church as the 'Corruptions of Christianity.' Thus you cleanse the temple of truth as our Lord would have cleansed that of Jerusalem, if he had thrown down the tables of show-bread as well as the tables of the money changers, and if He had turned out the cherubim of glory as He did the beasts which defiled that holy place. In short, you treat our Lord's divinity as the Jews treated His humanity when they numbered Him with felons, that the mob might cry with a show of piety, 'Away with Him! Crucify Him!' with the thieves, His accursed companions!"

On the mysterious and holy doctrine of the Trinity in unity, Fletcher writes:—

"That there is a Supreme, Infinite, and Eternal Mind by which the world was made, is evident from the works of creation and providence. Every leaf of the trees which cover a thousand hills, every spire of the grass which clothes a thousand vales, echoes, 'There is a God.' But the peculiar mode of His existence is far above our reach. Of this we only know what He plainly reveals to us, and what we may infer from what He hath plainly revealed; for sooner shall the vilest insect find out the nature of man, than the brightest man shall of himself discover the nature of God.

"It is agreed on all hands that the Supreme Being, compared with all other beings, is One,—one Creator over numberless creatures, one Infinite Being over myriads of finite beings, one Eternal Intelligence over millions of temporary intelligences. The distance between the things made and Him that made them being boundless, the living God must stand for ever far higher above all that lives, than the sun stands superior to all the beams it emits, and to all the tapers lighted at its fire. In this sense, true Christians are all Unitarians: God having plainly revealed His unity by the prophets, by the Apostles, and by our Lord Himself, there is no doubt about this point. And may the hand which writes these sheets wither a thousand times over rather than it should designedly write one word against this glorious and ever-adorable unity!

"But although the Supreme Being is One when He is compared to all created beings, shall we quarrel with Him when He informs us that notwithstanding he has no second in the universe of creatures, yet, in Himself, He exists in a wonderful manner, insomuch that His own eternal and perfect essence subsists, without division or separation, under three adorable distinctions, which are called sometimes 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;' and sometimes 'the Father, the Word, and the Spirit'? 'Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?' or, Why dost Thou exist after such a manner?"

Fletcher then proceeds to describe the different opponents of his doctrine; namely,—

"*Tritheists*, who so unscripturally distinguish the Divine Persons as to divide and separate them into three deities; and who, by this means, run into polytheism, or the belief of many gods. *Ditheists*, generally called Arians, who worship two gods, a great god and a little god; the former uncreate, the latter created; the former God by nature, and the latter only by courtesy. *Deists*, who so unscripturally maintain the unity of the Divine essence as to admit but one Divine subsistence;" and who include Jews, Mahometans, Infidels, and Socinians.

Fletcher next undertakes to show and prove that God the Father has a proper Son, by whom He made the world; that our Lord Jesus Christ claimed the divine honour of being this Son; that He is the Redeemer and Saviour of lost mankind; that He is to be the final and universal Judge; and that divine worship was paid to Him by patriarchs, prophets, and Apostles, and is His undoubted right.

Fletcher's second pamphlet, entitled "Socinianism Unscriptural," consists of eight letters, addressed to Dr. Priestley, in which he shows that Socinians err when they assert that the prophets always spoke of the Messiah as of a mere man like themselves. He proves that our first parents expected a *Divine* Messiah, and that the *Divine Person* who appeared to the patriarchs, and to Moses, was Jehovah, the Son, or Christ in His pre-existent state; that the foundation of the proofs of Christ's divinity, in the writings of the prophets, is laid in the three original prophecies (Gen. iii. 15,

xxii. 16, etc., and xlix. 8-10), recorded by Moses concerning the Messiah; that all the prophets bear witness to His Godhead, as do also the Evangelists and Apostles.

This is a meagre outline of Fletcher's exceedingly able pamphlet, but nothing more can be here attempted. Two brief extracts, however, may be added, illustrative of his style:—

> "I have proved that the king of Israel who brought his people out of Egypt was Christ, in His pre-existent nature. Moses was the prime minister of this great King; Joshua, the general of His armies; the tabernacle, His palace; the mercy-seat, His throne; the ark, His royal standard; the priests, His officers; the Levites, His guards; and the shekinah, the visible display of His presence."
>
> "Read, dear Sir, the Scriptures without the veil of your system, and you will see that the Messiah, the wonderful Person whom you so constantly endeavour to degrade, was to be a mediating Prophet, like Moses; an atoning Priest, like Aaron; a pacific King, like Solomon; a royal Prophet, like David; a kingly Priest, like Melchisedec; the Everlasting Father, as the Logos by whom all things were created; and the Mighty God, as the proper Son of Him with whom He shares, in the unity of the Divine Spirit, the supreme title of 'Jehovah, Lord of hosts.'"

It has been already shown in a letter which Fletcher addressed to Wesley in 1755, the year of his conversion, that he was what is commonly called a Millenarian. Twenty-nine years had elapsed since then. During this long interval, no man had been a more diligent and devout student of the Holy Scriptures than himself, and yet his Millenarian belief remained unchanged. Hence the following remarkable passage in his "Socinianism Unscriptural." After quoting and paraphrasing Isa. lxvi. 15-24, Fletcher proceeds to say:—

> "Here ends Isaiah's account of that glorious reign of Jehovah-Shiloh, which the fathers called the 'Millennium,' as being to last a thousand years, and during which it is probable our Lord will use these extraordinary means to keep all the nations in the way of obedience:—1. A constant display of His goodness over all the earth, but particularly in and about Jerusalem, where the Lord will manifest His glory, and bless His happy subjects with new manifestations of His presence every Lord's day and every new moon. 2. A distinguishing interposition of Providence which will withhold the Messiah's wonted blessings from the disobedient (Zech. xiv. 17). 3. The constant endeavours of the saints, martyrs, patriarchs, prophets, and Apostles, raised from the dead and conversing with men, as Moses and Elijah did with our Lord's disciples

upon the mount, where they were indulged with a view of His glorified person, and of His 'kingdom come with power.' These glorified high priests and kings, as ministers and lieutenants of the Messiah, will rule all churches and states with unerring wisdom and unwarped fidelity. 4. The care that the Lord Himself will take to set apart for the ministry, under His glorified saints, those who in every nation shall distinguish themselves by their virtue and piety. This seems to be the meaning of His own words: 'And when they shall come out of all nations to My holy mountain, I will take of them for priests and Levites, saith the Lord,' Isaiah lxvi. 20, 21. 5. A standing display of the ministration of condemnation, as appears from Isaiah lxvi. 24, and from other parallel Scriptures. 6. At the same time that the ministration of condemnation will powerfully work upon the fears of mankind to keep men in the way of duty, an occasional display of the ministration of righteous mercy will work upon their hopes. How will those hopes be fired when they shall 'see the Lamb' of God 'standing on the Mount Sion, and with Him' His 'hundred and forty-four thousand' worthies, 'having His Father's name,' Divine Majesty, Irresistible Power, Ineffable Love, and Bliss Inexpressible, 'written on their foreheads!' (Rev. xiv). But, 7. What will peculiarly tend to keep men from lapsing into rebellion against God will be the long life of the godly, and the untimely death of those who shall offer to tread the paths of iniquity. The godly shall attain to the years of antediluvian patriarchs, and the wicked shall not live out half their days; they shall not live above a hundred years; or, to speak after our manner, they shall die in their childhood. This seems to be Isaiah's meaning in Isaiah lxv. 17-25."

Leaving it to others to advocate or to attack these interpretations of Scripture, the present writer will only add, that thus full of firm unwavering faith in the Divine majesty and glorious kingship of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the devout and reverent Fletcher drew near to the mysterious spirit-world.

In harmony with all this, Fletcher wrote to his friend, Mr. Henry Brooke, of Dublin, as follows :—

"MADELEY, *April* 27, 1784.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—Mercy, peace, and perfect love attend you, and your dear partner, and the dear friends who live under your roof; and with whom I beg you may abide under the cross, till, with John, Mary, and Salome, you *all* can say, 'We are crucified with Him, and the life we now live, we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.'

"With respect to the glory of the Lord, *it is at hand;* whatever false wisdom and unbelief may whisper to our hearts. It can be no farther off than the presence of Him, who *fills all in all.*

"With respect to what you say of the kingdom not coming with the outward pomp, which is observable by the men of the world, it is strictly true; but that there is an *inward* display of *power* and *glory* under Pentecostal Christianity is undeniable, both from our Lord's *promises* to His imperfect disciples, and from their *experiences* after the kingdom of God was come to them with power. To wait in deep resignation, and with a constant attention to what the Lord will please to do or say concerning us and His Church; and to leave to Him *the times and seasons*, is what I am chiefly called to do; taking care to avoid falling into either *speculation* careless of *action*, or into the *activity* which is devoid of *spirituality*. I *would* not have a lamp without oil; and I *could* not have oil without a lamp, and a vessel to hold it in for myself, and to communicate it to others.

"Fare you all well in Christ! So prays
"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

On the day that Fletcher penned the foregoing, his wife wrote as follows to Mrs. Smyth, their hostess in Dublin. The letter, however, was signed, "John and Mary Fletcher," and has not before been published. It furnishes a glimpse of the Madeley Methodists:—

"*April* 27, 1784.

"MY VERY DEAR MADAM,—If anything I said in my last was attended with a blessing, I give glory to my adorable Father. I am ready to wonder that He ever works by so poor a worm.

"I wish you had been with us yesterday morning, in our upper chamber, to hear the simple tales of our dear women. Do you remember a little woman, who sat in the window of the room when you met the class, and who expressed great desire for more of the life of God? It was she who lived on horse-beans so many weeks, while suckling twins, for fear of running into debt for bread. She has, since then, been greatly exercised by poverty, temptation, and illness; but, in all, her desire for the pure image of God seemed to rise above every other wish; and, about a fortnight ago, the Lord poured out upon her such an abundance of His Spirit, that nature almost sank beneath it. She told us yesterday, that every moment she seems to be so surrounded with God, and so penetrated with His love, that, said she, 'I cannot help, many times in the day, stopping in the midst of my work, when alone, to shout aloud, Glory! Glory! Glory! My very heart is glad. Yes, my heart is *so glad*, I could shout from morning till night; but, oh! I can think of no words to tell what I see and feel of Jesus. I *can* choose nothing: I know *no will—no choice:* the will of God is my all.' Had you heard her speak, and also two others who have just found the Lord, you would have wept tears of love and joy.

---

[1] "Thirteen Original Letters of the Rev. John Fletcher." Bath, 1791, p. 36.

"Our love to Dr. Coke; and thank him for his two letters, which we have received.

"Begging our tender regards to all our dear Christian friends, we remain, with kindest remembrance and grateful acknowledgment to our dear Mr. and Mrs. Smyth, their sincere though unworthy friends,

"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."

The next is a letter which, I believe, has not before been published. It was addressed to a sister of Lady Mary Fitzgerald, and is full of faith in Christ:—

"Christ Jesus is alone the desirable, the everlasting distinction and honour of men. All other advantages are like the down on the thistle, blown away in a moment. Riches are incapable of satisfying; friends are changeable; dear relations are taken away with a stroke; but, amid all the changes of life, Christ is a Rock. To see Him by faith, to lay hold on Him, to rely on Him, to live upon Him, this—this is the refuge from the storm, the shadow from the heat.

"In order that you may obtain it, nothing more or less is required, on your part, than a full and frequent confession of your own abominable heart; and kneeling, as a true beggar, at the door of mercy, declaring you come there only expecting notice and relief because God our Saviour came to redeem incarnate devils and to convert them into saints.

"I think you take a sure method to perplex yourself if you look at yourself for proof of faith. Others must see it in your works; but you must feel it in your heart. The glory of Jesus is, by faith, realized to the mind in some such manner as an infinitely grand and beauteous object in the firmament of heaven arrests the spectator on itself. It captivates him; and, by the pleasure it imparts, he is led on to view it. So it is with Jesus, our peace, strength, righteousness, salvation.

"For my own part, I am often tempted to suspect whether I am not speaking great swelling words of Christ, and yet am myself nothing more than sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and I find that the only successful way of answering this doubt is an immediate address to Jesus Christ, and prayer to Him, to this effect: 'Whosoever cometh unto Thee, Thou wilt in no wise cast out. Lord, have I not come unto Thee? Am I not depending on Thee for life, as a brand plucked out of the fire? See if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!'

"My eyes look to the blessed Jesus; my heart longs to be more in His service; I mourn my corruptions; they are many and great. When I look at Him, and contemplate His finished salvation, I admire, I adore, in some measure I love. When I look at myself, my heart rises at the sight,—black and selfish, proud and carnal, covetous and unclean. I want all things that are good; but, oh! I have a blessed Lord Christ, in whom all fulness dwells for me, and for my dear friend to whom I am writing,—a fulness of pardon, wisdom, holiness, strength, peace, salvation, righteousness,—a fulness of mercy, goodness, truth,—all this, and ten thousand times more, without condition, without qualification, without workings, without servings, only for receiving. O blessed free grace of God! What a gift! And for whom? My dear friend, for you. What says the everlasting God? 'Believe He gave His Son for sinners.' Can God lie? Impossible! Can we have a better foundation to build upon than the promise and the oath of God?

"My very dear friend, I know you will not be angry at my preachment. I aim all I say at my own heart. I stand more in need of it than you; and I always feel my heart refreshed when I am talking or thinking of the blessed Jesus. But oh! how little I know of Him! O Thou light of the world, enlighten me! Teach me to know more of Thy infinite, unsearchable riches, that I may love Thee with an increasing love, and serve Thee with an increasing zeal till Thou bring me to glory!"

Gratitude was one of Fletcher's characteristics. Hence, when the son of his dead friend, Mr. Charles Greenwood, of Stoke Newington, visited him at Madeley, he wrote to the loving widow:—

"Madeley, June 20, 1784. The sight of Mr. Greenwood, in his son, has brought some of my Newington scenes to my remembrance, and I beg leave to convey my tribute of thanks by his hands. Thanks! Thanks! What, nothing but words? There is my humbling case. I wish to requite your manifold kindnesses, but I cannot. I must be satisfied to be ever your insolvent debtor. Nature and grace do not love it. Proud nature lies uneasy under great obligations; and thankful grace would be glad to put something in the scale opposite to that which you have filled with so many favours. But what shall I put? I wish I could send you all the Bank of England, and all the Gospel of Christ; but the first is not mine, and the second is already *yours*."[1]

Wesley's annual Conference, in 1784, was held at Leeds. He writes, in his Journal:—

"1784, Tuesday, *July* 27. Our Conference began; at which four of our brethren, after long debate (in which Mr. Fletcher[2] took much pains), acknowledged their fault, and all that was past was forgotten. Thursday, July 29, being the public Thanksgiving Day, as there was not room for us in the old church, I read prayers, as well as preached, at our Room. I admired the whole service for the day. The prayers, Scriptures, and every part of it, pointed at one thing: 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.' Having five clergymen to assist me, we administered the Lord's Supper, as was supposed, to sixteen or seventeen hundred persons. Sunday, August 1. We were fifteen clergymen at the old church. Tuesday, August 3. Our Conference concluded in much love, to the great disappointment of all."

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 300.

[2] Before attending the Conference, Fletcher visited Miss Ritchie, who wrote: "1784, July 16. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher visited Otley. I was truly blessed and edified by their society. Our house was full of company." ("Memoir of Mrs. Mortimer," by Agnes Bulmer, p. 97.)

Such is Wesley's brief account of one of the most important Conferences he ever held, and the last which Fletcher had the opportunity of attending. During the year, Dr. Coke had begun the Methodist Foreign Missionary Society; and Wesley had signed and sealed his famous "Deed of Declaration," constituting, for all time to come, the Legal Conference of the Methodists, and defining the powers and duties of its members. Charles Atmore, who was present, relates,[1] that, on the Sunday evening before the Conference opened, the congregation, assembled to hear Wesley, was four times greater than the chapel could contain, and, therefore, Wesley "preached in a field adjoining, on the judgment of the great day." On Monday morning, Fletcher "preached an excellent sermon from Matt. v. 13—16, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,'" etc. At night, Wesley took for his text, "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son." On Tuesday morning, at five o'clock, Henry Moore delivered a sermon founded upon "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." At the conclusion of the service, Wesley "opened the Conference;" and, in the evening of the day, preached from, "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered," etc. Next morning, July 28, at five o'clock, the text of Thomas Taylor was, "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." At night, Wesley preached from, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Thursday, July 29, "was a high day indeed." At five a.m. Thomas Hanby discoursed on "My grace is sufficient for thee," etc. In the forenoon, Wesley expounded and enforced 1 Cor. xiii. 1—4, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity," etc. Then followed the sacramental service, in which Wesley was assisted by Fletcher, Coke, Cornelius

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1845, p. 12.

Bayley, who had been Fletcher's curate, Mr. Dillon, an ordained clergyman from Ireland, and the well-known David Simpson, of Macclesfield, the services of the day being concluded with another sermon from Wesley, on the text, "This is the first and great commandment." At five a.m. on Friday, July 30, Joseph Pilmoor preached from "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved; and, at night, Fletcher, from, "These all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."[1] At seven o'clock on Sunday morning, August 1, Fletcher preached again, taking as his text 1 Kings xiii. 26, selected from the first lesson for the day: "It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord: therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake unto him." Joseph Benson, who was present, writes:—

> "Mr. Fletcher drew such a picture of the degradation and misery of a backsliding minister, and of the corruption and injury he introduced into the Church of Christ, as produced a general and deep sensation, not easily to be forgotten."

And Henry Moore, another of Fletcher's auditors, remarks:—

> "I was extremely impressed with the whole service: the shadow of the Divine presence was seen among us, and His going forth was in our sanctuary."

Next morning, Mr. Moore himself had to preach. He writes:—

> "I went to the chapel at the hour appointed, and, to my dismay, found the venerable Mr. Fletcher in the pulpit, leaning upon his staff. My first impression was to run away; but a moment's reflection changed

---

[1] Respecting this sermon, John Beaumont, father of the celebrated Rev. Dr. Joseph Beaumont, wrote: "Mr. Fletcher dwelt much on the context, which speaks of the faith and works of the ancient worthies, and strongly enforced what he termed a *working faith*. I was blessed beyond description, and thought him certainly the most angelic man I had ever heard." ("The Experience and Travels of John Beaumont.")

my purpose. I ascended the pulpit and gave out the hymn; while I did so, my knees smote one against the other: I knelt down to pray, and indeed lifted my heart with my voice, that I might be endued with power and wisdom from on high: my soul was calmed, and I took my text, and continued the service, fully set free from fear, and strengthened in my resolution ever to obey the voice of duty."[1]

At five o'clock on the following morning, Wesley, eighty-one years of age, again preached, selecting a text admirably adapted to be a sequel to that chosen by Fletcher on the previous Sunday; and also peculiarly suited to what had taken place in the Conference: "And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you; therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever" (Jer. xxxv. 18, 19). The Conference was concluded on Tuesday, August 3; and next morning, at five o'clock, Wesley delivered another sermon, and immediately afterwards took the coach for Wales. His last text, at this remarkable Conference, was, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."[2]

A purpose is intended to be served by these minute statements, namely, to convey an idea of what Methodist Conferences were in the olden times, and to indicate the chief preachers, and the *kind* of texts they took.

It is a well-known fact that the great event of the Conference of 1784 was the rebellion raised in Wesley's camp of preachers. In his "Deed of Declaration," he had appointed his brother Charles, Dr. Coke, James Creighton, and ninety-seven of his itinerants to be, after his decease, his legalized successors, and to exercise the powers he had exercised from the beginning. By confining the number of the members of the legal Conference to a hundred, he necessarily excluded not fewer than ninety-two, whom he had employed in circuit work; and, among these, there were several who had claims quite equal to many of the elected ones, as, to wit, Thomas Lee, John Atlay, John Pritchard, John Pool, John Hampson, sen., John Hampson, jun., William Eells, and Joseph Pillmoor. Previous to the Conference being held, certain of the non-elected preachers published a protest against Wesley's partiality. The crisis was a serious one. Fletcher was not included in the hundred, probably because he desired to be left out; but he was intensely anxious respecting apprehended results. Mrs. Fletcher wrote:—

---

[1] "Life of Henry Moore," by Mrs. Smith, p. 321.
[2] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1845, p. 14.

> "O how deeply was he affected for the welfare of his brethren, when we were at Leeds, in the year 1784! When disputes arose among them, his soul groaned beneath the burden. By two or three o'clock in the morning, I was sure to hear him breathing out prayers for the peace and prosperity of Sion; and when I said to him, I was afraid this would hurt his health, and that I wished him to sleep more, he would answer, 'O Polly, the cause of God lies near my heart.'"

At the opening of the Conference, on July 27, Wesley mentioned the "Deed of Declaration," and the "Appeal" which had been published against it:—

> "He showed that, from the commencement of Methodism, the annual Conferences had always consisted of persons whom he had desired to meet for the purpose of conferring with him. He insisted, that he had a right to name the members of the Legal Conference, and to fix their number. The 'Appeal,'" he said, "represented him as unjust, oppressive, and tyrannical, which he was not; the authors of it had betrayed him; and, by doing so, had hurt the minds of many, and kindled a flame throughout the kingdom. Hence, he required that they should acknowledge their fault, and be sorry for it, or he could have no further connection with them."[1]

For seven days, the dispute remained unsettled. Fletcher acted as mediator.

> "Never," says Charles Atmore, "shall I forget the ardour and earnestness with which Mr. Fletcher expostulated, even on his knees, both with Mr. Wesley and the preachers. To the former, he said, 'My father! my father! they have offended, but they are your children!' To the latter, he exclaimed, 'My brethren! my brethren! he is your father!'

---

[1] Benson's "Life," by Macdonald, p. 160.

> and then, portraying the work in which they were unitedly engaged, he fell again on his knees, and with fervour and devotion engaged in prayer. The Conference was bathed in tears; many sobbed aloud."[1]

This appears to have been on the last day but one that the Conference sat. Hence Joseph Benson writes:—

> "August 2. Our brethren, who had been concerned in the 'Appeal,' rejoiced our hearts, by acknowledging their fault, and making submission. In consequence of their doing so, they were admitted among their brethren, and appointed to Circuits."[2]

It may be added, that, the principal appellants—John Hampson, sen., and John Hampson, jun., Joseph Pillmoor, John Atlay, and William Eels—soon afterwards left the Connexion.

Two other incidents, concerning the Conference, must be mentioned.

It is a well-known fact, that, one of the most important questions asked at Wesley's Conferences was, "Are there any objections to any of our preachers?" Upon the question being put, the names of all (Wesley's name included), were read seriatim. When this part of the business of the Conference, in 1784, was reached, Fletcher rose from his seat, to withdraw from the chapel.

> "He was eagerly recalled, and asked why he would leave them? 'Because,' said he, 'it is improper, and painful to my feelings, for me to hear the minute failings of my brethren canvassed, unless my own character be submitted to the same scrutiny.' They promised, if he would stay, that his character should be investigated. On these terms, he consented to remain; and, when his name was read, an aged preacher rose, bowed to him, and said, 'I have but one thing to object to Mr. Fletcher; God has given him a richer talent than his humility will suffer him duly to appreciate. In confining himself to Madeley, he puts his light, comparatively, under a bushel; whereas, if he would come out more among us, he would draw immense congregations, and would do much more good.' In answer to this, Mr. Fletcher stated the tender and sacred ties which bound him to his parish; its numerous population; the daily calls for his services; the difficulty of finding a proper substitute; his increasing infirmities, which disqualified him for horse exercise; his unwillingness to leave Mrs. Fletcher at home; and the expense of travelling in carriages. In reply to his last argument, another

---

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1845, p. 15.
[2] Benson's "Life," by Macdonald, p. 160.

preacher arose, and observed that the expense of his journeys would be cheerfully paid; and that, though he knew and highly approved Mr. Fletcher's disinterestedness and delicacy in pecuniary transactions, yet he feared there was a mixture of pride in his objection; for that by no importunity could he be prevailed on to accept a present to defray his expenses on his late visit to Ireland. 'A little explanation,' replied Mr. Fletcher, 'will set that matter right. When I was invited to visit my friends at Dublin, I had every desire to accept their invitation; but I wanted money for the journey, and knew not how to obtain it. In this situation, I laid the matter before the Lord, humbly requesting that, if the journey were a providential opening to do good, I might have the means of performing it. Shortly afterwards, I received an unexpected sum of money, and took my journey. While in Dublin, I heard our friends commiserating the distresses of the poor, and lamenting the inadequate means they had to relieve them. When, therefore, they offered me a handsome present, what could I do? The necessary expenses of my journey had already been supplied; my general income was quite sufficient; I needed nothing. Had I received the money, I should have given it away. The poor of Dublin most needed, and were most worthy of, the money of their generous countrymen. How then could I hesitate to beg that it might be applied to their relief? You see, brethren, I could not in conscience do otherwise than I did.'"[1]

After these explanations, the honest old Methodist preachers, of course, recorded no objection to the "*character*" of John Fletcher; but Wesley, nearly a year afterwards, wrote to his brother Charles:—

"1785, June 2. About once a quarter, I hear from Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher. I grudge his sitting still; but who can help it? I love ease as well as he does; but I dare not take it while I believe there is another world."[2]

Fletcher's examination, on this occasion, took place by special arrangement: if he had lived, perhaps, it would afterwards have been a matter of course; for, about the middle of the Conference, he rose, and, addressing Wesley, said:—

"I fear my successor will not be interested in the work of God, and my flock may suffer. I have done what I could. I have built a chapel in Madeley Wood, and I hope, Sir, you will continue to supply it, and that Madeley may still be part of a Methodist Circuit. If you please, I should be glad to be put down in the 'Minutes' as a supernumerary."

---

[1] Benson's "Life of Fletcher."
[2] Wesley's Works, vol. xii., p. 142.

Wesley was not easily moved, but even he could hardly bear this, and the preachers burst into tears.[1]

The other incident, to be mentioned, was of a different kind, and is a good illustration of the remarkable allegorical talent which Fletcher possessed, and often exercised, not only in his published works, but in his correspondence, and in conversation among his friends.

On March 31, 1784, Wesley visited Burslem, where Mr. Enoch Wood resided, a Methodist, and an artist of great ability. Mr. Wood prevailed on Wesley to permit him to model a bust from his person; and a considerable number of copies were executed. The likeness was so striking, that, when Wesley looked at the bust, he said to Mr. Wood, "If you touch it again, you will mar it." Every wrinkle, dimple, and vein of the face and forehead were marked with perfect accuracy. Four months afterwards, Mr. Wood went to the Conference at Leeds, and soon became one of the most popular men there. Samuel Bardsley hoisted the artist on his shoulder; at the moment, Fletcher was passing through the grave-yard, and was told, by the applauding preachers, the name of the hero, so ludicrously exhibited. Fletcher paused a moment, and then said, "Are you the young man who made that beautiful likeness of Mr. Wesley?" Being answered in the affirmative, and having been made acquainted with the whole process of making the bust, he stood on a grave, and, putting his hand on the artist's shoulder, he began to spiritualize what he had heard, by using it to illustrate the work of God, in the *new* creation of the human soul, by the power of the Holy Ghost. He spoke of the rough and unpromising materials,—the corrupt nature derived from fallen Adam; he showed how this, by the energy of the Holy Spirit, is softened and melted down into godly sorrow; how it becomes *plastic* in the hands of the Divine Artist; how it is cast into a new mould: and how it is formed after the likeness of Christ. His extemporaneous address lasted twenty minutes, and was never forgotten by those who heard it.[2]

It may be added that, some years afterwards, Dr. Adam

---

[1] Mrs. Fletcher's "Life," by H. Moore, p. 183.
[2] *Christian Miscellany*, 1848, p. 230.

Clarke obtained from Mr. Wood the loan of the original mould, and had a bust cast in solid brass, which is now in the possession of Mr. G. J. Stevenson. This was lent to the sculptor who chiselled the marble effigy of Wesley, now placed in the entrance-hall of the Wesleyan Theological Institution, Richmond. The face and head of the effigy were obtained from it.[1]

On his return to Madeley, Fletcher wrote to his friend, Mr. Ireland, as follows:—

"MADELEY, *September* 13, 1784.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I keep in my sentry-box till Providence removes me. My situation is *quite suited* to my little strength. I may do as much or as little as I please, according to my weakness; and I have an advantage, which I can have nowhere else in such a degree,—my little field of action is just at my own door, so that if I happen to overdo myself, I have but to step from my pulpit to my bed, and from my bed to my grave. If I had a body full of vigour, and a purse full of money, I should like well enough to travel about as Mr. Wesley does; but as Providence does not call me to it, I readily submit. The snail does best in its shell; were it to aim at galloping, like the racehorse, it would be ridiculous indeed. My wife is quite of my mind with respect to the call we have to a sedentary life. We are two poor invalids, who between us make *half* a labourer.

"We shall have tea cheap and light very dear;[2] I don't admire the change. Twenty thousand chambers walled up, and filled with foul air, are converted into so many dungeons for the industrious artizan, who, being compelled by this murderous tax, denies himself the benefit of *light* and *air*. Blessed be God! the light of heaven and the air of the spiritual world are still free.

"My dear partner sweetly helps me to drink the dregs of life, and to carry with ease the daily cross. We are not long for this world—we *see* it, we *feel* it; and, by looking at death and his conqueror, we fight beforehand our last battle with that last enemy whom our dear Lord has overcome for us. That we may triumph over him with an humble, Christian courage is the prayer of, my dear friend, yours,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[3]

Fletcher's apprehension of the nearness of death, so far as he was concerned, was realized; but his wife did not die until thirty-one years after this, not a year of which passed without her keeping the anniversary of their wedding-day. In the present year she wrote :—

---

[1] Stevenson's "Memorials of the Wesley Family," p. 349.

[2] On June 21, Pitt moved several resolutions to put an end to smuggling by reducing the duty upon tea from 50 to 12½ per cent.; and to increase the window tax in proportion. These resolutions were passed, though not without much debate.

[3] Letters, 1791, p. 302.

> "1784, November 12. We have been married three years this day. A good day it has been to me! While reflecting on the wonderful goodness of God in my providential union with my dear husband (so far, so very far, beyond my warmest wishes), my heart was enlarged with desire to render to my God a suitable return for all His mercies!"[1]

On her birthday, two months previously, she had written in her journal :—

> "September 12. This day I am forty-five years old. I have had such a sense of the goodness of God toward me as I cannot express. I am filled with favours. I have the best of husbands, who daily grows more and more spiritual, and I think more healthful, being far better than when we first married. My call also is so clear, and I have such liberty in the work, and such sweet encouragement among the people. My servant, too, is much improved, and as faithful as if she were my own child. An income quite comfortable, and a good deal to help the poor with! O what shall I render to the Lord for all the mercies He hath shown unto me!"

In this happy home, Fletcher wrote the following happy letter to a youth, his godson, by name John Fennel :—

> "MADELEY, *November* 28, 1784.
>
> "DEAR JOHN,—I rejoice to hear that you think of a better world; and of that better part which Mary, and your mother—another Mary—chose before you. May all her prayers, and, above all, may the dew of heaven, come down upon your soul in solemn thoughts, heavenly desires, and strong resolutions to be the Lord's, cost what it will. Let the language of your heart and lips be, 'I will be a follower of Christ, a child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.' A noble promise this! of which I have so peculiar a right to put you in mind. In order to be this happy and holy soul, you must not forget that your Christian name, your Christian vow, and ten thousand reasons beside, bind you to turn your back upon the world, the flesh, and the devil; and to set yourself to look steadfastly to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.
>
> "Dear John, you have no time to lose. We have calls here to the young without end. I lately buried, in our churchyard, two brothers and sisters in the same grave. Be you also ready! I was praying for you some nights ago on my bed, in my sleepless hours; and I asked for you the faith of righteous Abel, the chastity of Joseph, the early

---

[1] "Mrs. Fletcher's Life," by H. Moore, p. 158.

piety of Samuel, the right choice of young Solomon, the self-denial and abstinence of Daniel, together with the early zeal and undaunted courage of his three friends; but, above all, I asked that you might follow John the Baptist and John the Apostle as they followed our Lord. Back, earnestly back my prayers. So shall you be faithful, diligent, godly; a blessing to all around you, and a comfort to your affectionate old friend and minister,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[1]

At this period, the Rev. Charles Simeon, a young man of twenty-five, and full of faith and zeal, was rising into great popularity among the Methodist clergymen of the day. He was an intimate friend of Berridge and of Henry Venn; and had recently visited Riland at Birmingham, Cadogan at Reading, Pentycross at Wallingford, and Robinson at Leicester;[2] and now, toward the end of 1784, he came to Fletcher at Madeley. As soon as he entered the vicarage, Fletcher took him by the hand and brought him into the parlour, where the two engaged in prayer. That being ended, Fletcher asked Simeon to preach in the church. After some hesitation, Simeon consented; and away went Fletcher, bell in hand, through the village, and, ringing as loudly as he could, told the people they must attend church, for a young clergyman from Cambridge had come to preach to them.

After the service in the church, Fletcher and his visitor went for a walk, in the course of which they entered the ironworks. Simeon was surprised at the aptitude of Fletcher to turn everything he saw to spiritual profit. To one of the ironworkers, hammering on an anvil, he remarked, "O, pray to God that He may hammer that hard heart of yours." To another, who was heating a bar of iron, "Ah! thus it is that God tries His children in the furnace of affliction." And to a third, who was drawing a furnace, "See, Thomas! if *you* can make such a furnace as that, think what a furnace God can make for sinners."[3]

Soon after this, Wesley wrote:—

"1784, Monday, December 20. I went to Hinxworth, where I had the satisfaction of meeting Mr. Simeon, Fellow of King's College in Cambridge. He has spent some time with Mr. Fletcher, at Madeley: two kindred souls; much resembling each other both in fervour of spirit and in the earnestness of their address. He gave me the pleasing information that there are three parishes in Cambridge wherein true Scriptural religion is preached, and several young gentlemen who are happy partakers of it."[1]

---

[1] *The Youth's Instructor*, 1835, p. 305.
[2] "Simeon's Memoirs," by W. Carus, M.A.
[3] *Christian Miscellany*, 1848, p. 326.

Fletcher, the Madeley revivalist, was closing his last year on earth; Simeon, the Cambridge one, lived and laboured for more than half a century afterwards; and who can say that in Simeon's life and labours the influence of Fletcher's spirit and example was not an element?

A few more extracts from Fletcher's letters, and then the end will come. Already he seemed to be waiting to "gather up his feet," and die. In a letter to Mrs. Thornton, a friend of the Greenwood family, at Stoke Newington, he wrote:—

"Madeley, *January* 21, 1785. I make just shift to fill up my little sentry box, by the help of my dear partner. Had we more strength, we should have opportunity enough to exert it. O that we were but truly faithful in our little place! Your great stage of London is too high for people of little ability and little strength; and, therefore, we are afraid of venturing upon it. We should be glad to rise high in usefulness; but God, who needs us not, calls us to sink in deep resignation and humility. His will be done!"[2]

Three weeks later, he wrote to the Right Hon. Lady Mary Fitzgerald, as follows:—

"Madeley, February 11, 1785. Who are we, my lady, that we should not be swallowed up by the holy, loving, living Spirit, who fills heaven and earth? Whether we consider it or not, there He is, a true, holy, loving, merciful God. Assent to it, my lady, believe it; rejoice in it. Let Him be God, *all in all;* your God in Christ Jesus. What an ocean of love to swim in—to dive into!"[3]

From Fletcher's letter to Wesley in 1755, and his "Socinianism Unscriptural," written during the last years of his life, it is undeniably evident that Fletcher was a Millenarian. The following letter, to Mr. Henry Brooke, of Dublin, refers to the same subject, but shows that he was not so confident with respect to some of his views as he had been heretofore.—

---

[1] Wesley's Journal.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 303.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 304.

"MADELEY, *February* 28, 1785.[1]

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—We are all shadows. Your mortal parent has passed away; and we must pass away after him. A lesson I learn daily, is to see things and persons in their *invisible root*, and in their *eternal principle;* where they are not subject to change, decay, and death; but where they blossom and shine in the primæval excellence allotted them by their gracious Creator. By this means, I learn to walk by faith, and not by sight. Tracing His image, in all the footsteps of nature, and finding out that which is of God *in ourselves*, is the true wisdom, genuine godliness. I hope you will never be afraid, nor ashamed of it. I see no danger in these studies and meditations, provided we still keep the end in view—the *all* of God, and the *shadowy nothingness* of all that is visible.

"With respect to the great Pentecostal display of the Spirit's glory, I still look for it within and without; and to look for it aright is the lesson I am learning. I am now led to be afraid of that in my nature, which would be for pomp, show, and visible glory. I am afraid of falling, by such an expectation, into what I call a spiritual Judaizing; into a looking for Christ's coming in my own pompous conceit, which might make me reject Him, if *His* wisdom, to crucify *mine*, chose to come in a meaner way: if, instead of coming in His Father's glory, He chose to come meek, riding, not on the cherubim, but on the foal of an ass. Our Saviour said, with respect to His going to the feast, 'My time is not yet come:' whether His time to come and turn the thieves and buyers out of the outward church is yet come, I know not. I doubt Jerusalem, and the holy place, are yet given to be trodden under foot by the Gentiles. But *my* Jerusalem! why it is not swallowed up of that which comes down from heaven, is a question which I wait to be solved by the teaching of the great Prophet, who is alone possessed of Urim and Thummim. The mighty power to wrestle with Him is all divine: and I often pray,—

"'That mighty faith on me bestow,
Which cannot ask in vain,
Which holds and will not let Thee go,
Till I my suit obtain:

"'Till Thou into my soul inspire
That perfect love unknown,
And tell my infinite desire,
Whate'er Thou wilt be done.'

---

[1] In an unpublished letter, dated, "Sunday Evening, *February* 27, 1785," and signed "John and Mary Fletcher," but evidently written by the latter, it is said:—"My dear Mr. Fletcher has had a bad cold; but is better. He is all alive, and living for eternity."

"In short, the Lord crucifies my *wisdom* and my *will* every way; but I must be crucified as the *thieves*. *All my bones must be broken;* for there is still in me that impatience of wisdom, which would stir, when the tempter says, 'Come down from the cross.' It is not for us to know the times and seasons, the manner and mystical means of God's working; but only to hunger and thirst, and lie passive before the great Potter. I begin to be content to be a vessel of *clay* or of *wood*, so that I may be emptied of self, and filled with my God, my all.

"I am exceeding glad that your dear partner goes on simply and believingly. Such a companion is a great blessing; for when two shall agree touching one thing in prayer, it shall be done. My wife and I endeavour to fathom the meaning of that deep promise. Join us, and let us search after that which exceeds *knowledge*—I mean the wisdom, and the power, the love, and the faithfulness of God.

"Adieu! *Be God's*, as the French say, and see God is *yours* in Christ, for you,[1] for brothers Dugdale, Shannon, Pickering, Mrs. Blashford, etc.

"We are your obliged friends,
"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."[2]

It must be confessed that there is a little mysticism in Fletcher's letter; but let it pass. The next was written a month later. The Rev. Peard Dickenson was now in the twenty-sixth year of his age. He had been ordained a deacon, on June 16, 1783, and, a few months afterwards, had been ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was now the Curate of the venerable Vicar of Shoreham, the Rev. Vincent Perronet, and wrote to Fletcher, asking his advice respecting pastoral visitation. Fletcher replied, as follows:—

"MADELEY, *March* 29, 1785.

"DEAR SIR,—I did not answer your obliging letter, because I thought it would be presumption in me to advise you, when you have my reverend father, Mr. Perronet, to advise with. To send a line, in those circumstances, appeared to me like 'sending coals to Newcastle.'

"However, having now an opportunity to forward a letter to London, I shall say what I have thought on the subject. It is exceeding well to visit from house to house, even the Infidels, to feel their pulse, and to see whether they do not begin to entertain more favourable thoughts of 'the pearl of great price' than grunting 'swine' or snarling 'dogs' generally do. Such visits, half upon the footing of Christian love, and half upon the footing of human civility, may tend to remove prejudices.

---

[1] These names are in the *original* letter.
[2] Letters, 1791, p. 307.

In some cases, writing a letter with tenderness, or giving a little tract suited to the circumstances of the person, may clear our own conscience, though it should do him no good.

"My love, respects, and duty, to your venerable Vicar, who, I am told, is now your grandfather.[1] I hope the report is well grounded; and, if it is, I wish you joy on entering into so respectable a family; and I wish you and your partner all the help and comfort I find in mine; who, as well as myself, desires to be kindly remembered to all the dear family at Shoreham.

"I am, dear Sir, your affectionate brother and servant in Christ,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

The Rev. Melville Horne was one of Fletcher's protegees. At Wesley's Conference, in 1784, he had been "admitted on trial," as a Methodist Itinerant Preacher, and appointed to the Liverpool circuit. It is well known that, after this, he obtained episcopal ordination, became curate at Madeley, published a collection of Fletcher's letters in 1791, went as a missionary to Western Africa, and, on his return to England, rose to considerable distinction. Fletcher had lent the young itinerant certain books, and now wrote to him the following letter, which refers to a practice which must have been of recent adoption. Romaine made it a rule to read nothing but the Bible; wisely or unwisely, Fletcher had begun, to some extent, to copy his example:—

"MADELEY, *May* 10, 1785.

"DEAR BROTHER,—I am sorry you should have been uneasy about the books. I received them safely, after they had lain for some days at Salop. I seldom look into any book but my Bible; not out of contempt, as if I thought they cannot teach me what I do not know; but because, '*Vita brevis, ars longa,*' I may never look into them again.

"Go on improving yourself by reading, but above all by *meditation* and *prayer*: and allow our Lord to refine you in the fire of temptation. Where you see a want, at home or abroad, within or without, look upon that want as a warning to avoid the cause of the leanness you perceive, and a call to secure the blessings which are ready to take their flight; for sometimes '*the true riches,*' like those of this world, make themselves wings and flee away. The heavenly dove may be grieved, and take its flight to humbler and more peaceful roofs. I am glad you do not want hard or violent measures: I hope you will never countenance them, no, not against what you dislike. I believe things will turn out very well at the Conference, and I shall be a witness of it, if the Lord gives me a commission to be a spectator of the order and quietness of those who shall be there. If not, I shall help you by prayer to draw the blessing of love upon our friends.[1]

---

[1] This was a premature statement. Mr. Dickenson did not marry Miss Briggs, Mr. Perronet's grand-daughter, until three years later.

[2] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1825, p. 745.

"In being moderate, humble, and truly desirous to be a Christian,—that is, to be the *least*, the *last*, and the *servant* of all, we avoid running ourselves into difficulties; we escape many temptations, and many mortifying disappointments. For my part, as I expect nothing from men, they cannot disappoint me; and, as I expect all good things from God, in the *time*, *way*, *measure*, and *manner* it pleaseth Him to bestow, here I cannot be disappointed; because He does, and will do, all things well.

"I trust you labour for God and souls, not for praise and self. When the latter are our aim, God, in mercy, blesses us with barrenness, that we may give up Barabbas, and release the humble Jesus, whom we crucify afresh by setting the thief on the throne, and the Lord of glory as our footstool: for so do those who preach Christ out of contention, or that they may have the praise of men.

"That God may bless you and your labours is the prayer of your old brother,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

A capital letter for a young Methodist preacher, like Melville Horne, who, six years afterwards, published it for the benefit of all Methodist probationers.

At this time, fever was raging at Madeley. Mr. W. Bosanquet, in an unpublished letter, addressed to his sister, Mrs. Fletcher, and dated "Bishopsgate Street, May 16, 1785," observed:—

"I am very happy to hear that both you and Mr. Fletcher have escaped the fevers, having been so much among them. The poor must feel themselves greatly obliged for this; for it is of much more use to visit them when sick than even to give them money."

The revered Vicar of Shoreham, the Rev. Vincent Perronet, died exactly a week before the date of this letter, and was buried on May 14, by Charles Wesley, who wrote to Mrs. Fletcher, as follows:—

"MARYLEBONE, *May* 24, 1785.

"MY DEAR SISTER,—If you love Mr. Fletcher, you ought to love the poor Methodists; for to their prayers you owe him, and he you. I found words, and the people faith, while we heard, at Bristol" (in 1776), "that our friend was just departing.[1] You have been the instrument of adding some years to his valuable life. Remember, for the short time that I shall want your prayers, my dear friend, your old faithful servant,

---

[1] Evidently, Fletcher hoped to attend Wesley's Conference, begun in London on July 26, 1785, but his hope was not fulfilled.

[2] Letters, 1791, p. 309.

"C. WESLEY."

And then, on the same sheet, the poet of Methodism wrote to Fletcher himself the following:—

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—You ought to have paid the last office, instead of me, to our most venerable Archbishop at Shoreham. On Sunday, I deposited the sacred ashes in his partner's grave, and preached twice. His death was such as his life promised. For many years, he breathed the pure spirit of love. The survivor who follows him nearest is *longo proximus intervallo.*

"A fortnight ago, I preached the condemned sermon to above twenty criminals. Every one of them, I have good grounds to believe, died penitent. Twenty more must die next week.

"Sally presents her duty and love: the rest join. Direct to me in Marylebone, and help me to depart in peace."[2]

This, probably, was the last letter which Fletcher received from his old and loving friend. Within three years afterwards, Charles Wesley did "depart in peace." Fletcher's last letters, written eight weeks after the date of the foregoing, were addressed to James Ireland, Esq., and to Lady Mary Fitzgerald. It has been already stated that fever was fatally prevalent at Madeley in the summer of 1785, and an extract from a letter written by William Bosanquet, Esq., expressing his happiness that Fletcher and his wife had escaped the pestilence, has been already given. Soon after that, the sister of Mr. Bosanquet caught the infection; and Fletcher wrote as follows to Mr. Ireland:—

"MADELEY, *July* 19, 1785.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Blessed be God, we are still alive, and, in the midst of many infirmities, we enjoy a degree of health, spiritually and bodily. O how good was the Lord, to come as Son of man to live here for us, and to come in His Spirit to live in us for ever! This is a mystery of godliness. The Lord make us *full* witnesses of it!

"A week ago, I was tried to the quick by a fever with which my dear wife was afflicted. Two persons, whom she had visited, having been carried off, within a pistol-shot of our house, I dreaded her being the third. But the Lord has heard prayer, and she is spared. Oh, what is life! 'On what a slender thread hang everlasting things!' My comfort, however, is, that this *thread* is as strong as the will of God, and the word of His grace, which cannot be broken.

---

[1] The reference is to the hymn quoted at page 362 of the present work.

[2] "Memoir of Mrs. Mortimer," p. 101.

"That grace and peace, love and thankful joy, may ever attend you is the wish of your most obliged friends,

"JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER."[1]

The day after this, he wrote the following to the Right Honorable Lady Mary Fitzgerald:—

"MADELEY, *July* 20, 1785.

"HON. AND DEAR LADY,—We have received your kind letter, and have mournfully acquiesced in the will of our heavenly Father, who, by various infirmities and providences, weans us from ourselves and our friends, that we may be His without reserve. It was, perhaps, a peculiar mercy that Providence blocked up your way to this place this summer. A bad putrid fever carries off several people in these parts. Two of our neighbours died of it last week; and my wife, who had visited them, was taken in so violent a manner, that I was obliged to offer her up to God in good earnest, as an oblation worthy a son of Abraham. I hope the worst is over; but her weakness will long preach to me, as well as my own.

"Dying people, we live in the midst of dying people. O let us live in sight of a dying, rising Saviour; and the prospect of death will become first tolerable, and then joyous! Or, if we weep, as our Lord, at the grave of our friends, or at the side of their deathbeds, we shall triumph in hope that all will be for the glory of God, and the good of our souls.

"I am, my dear lady, etc.,

"JOHN FLETCHER."[2]

Twenty-five days after writing this, his last letter, Fletcher himself was dead. His wife, who had so narrowly escaped becoming a victim to the prevailing fever, shall tell the remainder of his earthly story. The day after the funeral, she wrote a letter to Wesley, a copy of which she immediately gave to Fletcher's "old friend, Winifred Edmunds, whose son," says she, "prints it for the satisfaction of many who have made applications for some account of God's dealings with my beloved husband. I consider this a debt I owe to his dear orphans at Madeley; and, as it is probable I may be called away by the same fever, perhaps this may be the last office of love I can yield them." The title of the publication was, "A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, on the Death of the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, in Shropshire. Madeley: Printed by J. Edmunds." 16mo, 16 pp. About the same time, however, Mrs. Fletcher wrote a much longer account, which was printed with the following title: "A Letter to Mons. H. L. de la Flechere, Assessor Ballival of Nyon, in the Canton of Berne, Switzerland, on the Death of his Brother, the Reverend John William De la Flechere, Twenty-five Years Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire. London, 1786." 12mo, 64 pp. From these two publications, the following account is taken. Writing to Fletcher's brother, the mourning widow said:—

---

[1] Letters, 1791, p. 310.
[2] Fletcher's Works, vol. viii., p. 329.

"As there is no one to whom my dearest husband was more closely united than yourself, so there is no one who can more tenderly sympathize with me in a loss *so mutual*. You have expressed a desire to receive from my own pen some account of a life the most angelic I have ever known; and I will endeavour to comply with your request as far as my weak state of body and torn nerves will permit.

"From the beginning, he was a laborious workman in his Lord's vineyard, till he had spent himself in the best of services and was ripening fast for glory. Those sinners who fled from him he pursued to every corner of his parish by all sorts of ways, public and private, early and late, in season and out of season, entreating and warning them to flee from the wrath to come. Some made it an excuse for not attending the service on Sunday *mornings* that they did not awake early enough to get their families ready. He promised to be their watchman; and, taking a bell in his hand, was accustomed, at five in the morning, to go round the more distant parts of the parish, reminding the inhabitants of their invitation to the house of God.

"But he did not confine his labours to this parish. For many years, he regularly preached at places eight, ten, or sixteen miles distant, returning home the same night, though he seldom reached it before one or two in the morning. At a little Society, which he had gathered about six miles from Madeley, he preached two or three times in a week at five in the morning. As to visiting the sick, this was a duty for which he was ever ready. If he heard the knocker in the middle of the coldest winter night, his window was instantly thrown up, and the uniform answer was, '*I will attend you immediately*.'

"His frequent journeys to Trevecca, where he superintended a college of young men designed for the ministry, added much to his other fatigues,—riding on bad roads and wading through waters. Very often, in travelling through Wales, he was obliged to lie in damp and unsuitable lodgings; which, I have heard him observe, gave a deep stroke to his constitution.

"With regard to the *success* of his labours, it is a subject on which he has so often stopped my mouth that I will only say, besides the great reformation that has taken place in this parish, as to outward behaviour, he has left behind him a goodly company of upright, earnest people, whom he had gathered into little Societies, and who now mourn, as sheep bereaved of their dear shepherd.

"Never did I behold any one more dead to the things of the world. I have heard him say he was never happier than when he had given away the last penny he had in the house. If at any time I had gold in the drawer, it seemed to afford him no comfort; but if he could find a handful of small silver when going out to visit the sick, he would express as much pleasure over it as a miser would in discovering a bag of hidden treasure. He was never better pleased with my employment than when he had set me to prepare food or physic for the poor. He could hardly relish his dinner if some sick neighbour had not a part; nor could I sometimes keep the linen in his drawers for the same reason. On Sabbath days, he provided refreshments for numbers of people who came from a distance to hear the Word, and his house was devoted to their convenience. Once a poor widow, who feared God, being brought into difficulties, he immediately took all his pewter from the kitchen shelves, saying, 'This I can do without; it will relieve your want, and a wooden trencher serves me better.' Sometimes, in epidemic disorders, when the neighbours were afraid to nurse the sick, he has gone from house to house seeking help for them; and, when none could be found, has offered to sit up with the sick himself. In his younger years, he was ready to weep when five or six letters were brought, at threepence or fourpence a-piece, and he, perhaps, had only a shilling in the house to distribute among the poor to whom he was going. Frequently would he say to me, 'O Mary, cannot we do without beer? Let us drink water, and buy less meat, that our necessities may give way to the extremities of the poor.' But with all his charity, he was careful to avoid debts. While he gave all he could, he made it a rule to pay ready money for everything, believing this was the only way to keep the mind free from cares.

"He always had a steady, firm reliance upon the love and faithfulness of God. Sometimes, when I have expressed a fear of trials, he would answer, 'The Lord orders all, and I leave everything to Him. I always seem conscious He gives His angels charge concerning us, and therefore think we are equally safe everywhere.' He had many remarkable deliverances. Sometimes, both himself and his horse, in dark nights, have fallen down steep places, and yet both have been preserved. Once, I believe in Wales. in passing over a wooden bridge it broke asunder, and he and his mare sank into the river, but both got safe to land.

"A little before his last illness, being on his knees in prayer for light whether he should go to London or not,[1] the answer seemed to him, 'No, not to London, but to your grave.' Acquainting me with this, he said, with a heavenly smile, 'Satan would represent this as something awful, *the cold grave, the cold grave!*' On the following Sabbath (which I think was the next day), the anthem sung in the church was the Twenty-third Psalm. On his return home, he observed how the words of the Psalm had been blest to him; and from that time he seemed to be without the least temptation.

---

[1] No doubt to attend Wesley's Conference, which began on July 26.

"Still, there was scarce a night but some part of it was spent in groans for the souls and bodies of those committed to his care. I really dreaded his hearing either of the sins or sufferings of any of his people before he went to bed, knowing how strong the impression would be upon his mind.

"In the last years of his life, he never, except once, travelled far from home without being in danger of a relapse into his consumption; and after his return, he would be weeks before he recovered his usual strength. He also sometimes said to me that, though he had been engaged in the work of the Lord in various places and situations, the seasons of his closest communion with God were always in his own house and church.

"With regard to his communion with God, he constantly endeavoured to maintain an uninterrupted sense of the Divine presence. In order to this, he was slow of speech, and had the greatest government of his words. He acted, he spake, he thought, as under the immediate eye of God. Thus setting God always before him, he remained unmoved, at all times possessing internal recollection. I never saw him diverted therefrom on any occasion whatever. I travelled with him above a thousand miles, during which journeys neither change of company, place, nor circumstances ever seemed to make the least difference in his fixed attention to the presence of God. He was always striving to raise his own and every other spirit into close and immediate intercourse with God; and I can say, with truth, that all his union with me was so mingled with prayer and praise, that every employment and every meal were perfumed therewith.

"Some time ago, when the fever began to rage among us, he preached a sermon on visiting the sick; in which he seemed to be carried out of himself, observing, 'What do you fear? You are afraid of catching the distemper, and of dying with those who have it. O fear no more! What an honour to die in your Master's service! If this were permitted to me, I should esteem it a singular favour.'

"During the last few months, though his health and strength sensibly increased, he was constantly crying out for dying grace. Often would he say, 'O Mary, I am afraid lest we should have our good things here. Let us look up. Let us live above all. We have one foot in the grave.' He scarcely ever lay down or rose up without repeating—

"I nothing have, I nothing am;
My treasure's in the bleeding Lamb,
Both now and evermore.

"There was scarce an hour in which he was not calling upon me to drop every thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing but drinking deeper into God. We spent much time in prayer for the fulness of the Spirit, and were led to an act of *abandonment* (as we called it) of our whole selves into the hands of God, to do or to suffer whatever was pleasing to Him.

"On Thursday, August 4, he was occupied in the work of God from three in the afternoon till nine at night; when he came home, and said, 'I have taken cold.' On Friday and Saturday, he was poorly; but went out part of each day, and seemed uncommonly drawn out in prayer.

"On Saturday night, his fever first appeared very strong. I begged him not to go to the church in the morning; but to let a pious brother,[1] who was with us, preach in the yard; but he told me, it was the will of the Lord that he should go. When I met a little company of our pious women, on Sunday morning, I begged they would pray that he might be strengthened. In reading the prayers, he almost fainted. I got through the crowd, with a friend, and entreated him to come out of the desk, as did some others; but, in his sweet manner, he let us know we were not to interrupt the order of God. I then retired to my pew. All around me were in tears. When he was a little refreshed, by the windows being opened and a nosegay thrown into the desk by a friend, he proceeded with the service. Going into the pulpit, he preached with a strength and recollection which surprised us all. In his first prayer, he said, 'Lord, Thou wilt manifest Thy strength in weakness. We confer not with flesh and blood; but put our trust under the shadow of Thy wings.'

"His text was, 'O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' After sermon, he went up the aisle to the communion-table, with these words, 'I am going to throw myself under the wings of the cherubim, before the mercy-seat.' The congregation was large, and the service lasted till nearly two o'clock. Sometimes he could scarcely stand, and was often obliged to stop for want of power to speak. The people were deeply affected. Weeping was on every side. Notwithstanding his extreme weakness, he gave out several verses of hymns, and uttered various lively sentences of exhortation.

"As soon as the service was over, we hurried him away to bed, where he immediately fainted. He then dropped into a sleep for some time; and, when he awoke, he cried out, with a pleasant smile, 'Now, my dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work. He never fails me when I trust in Him.' He dozed most of the evening, now and then awaking full of the praises of God. At night, his fever returned, and his strength decreased amazingly.

"On Monday and Tuesday, he lay on a couch in the study, was at times very restless, but often slept. When awake, he was delighted in hearing me read hymns, and tracts on faith and love. His words were animating, and his patience beyond expression. I asked, 'Hast thou any conviction that the Lord is about to take thee?' He answered, 'No, not in particular; only I always see death so near, that we both seem to stand on the verge of eternity.' Sometimes he would say, 'O Polly! shall I ever see the day when thou must be carried out to be buried? I shrink at giving my dear Polly to the worms.' Awaking on one occasion, he said, 'It was Israel's fault that they asked *for signs.* We will not do so; but, abandoning our whole selves into the hands of God, we will there lie patiently, assured that He will do all things well.'

---

[1] No doubt, one of Wesley's preachers.

"On Wednesday, August 10, he told me, he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of the words, '*God is love*,' as he could not tell. 'It *fills me*,' he said, 'it *fills me* every moment. O Polly! my dear Polly! *God is love!* Shout! Shout aloud! Oh! it so fills me, that I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth. But it seems as if I could not speak much longer. Let us fix upon a sign between ourselves' (tapping me twice with his finger). 'By this I mean *God is love, and we will draw each other into God. Observe! by this we will draw each other into God.*' Sally coming in, he cried, 'O Sally! *God is love!* Shout, both of you! I want to hear you shout His praise!' All this time, his medical attendant hoped he was in no danger. He knew his disease to be the fever; but, as he had no bad headache, slept much without the least delirium, and had an almost regular pulse, the symptoms were thought to be favourable.

"On Thursday, August 11, his speech began to fail; but to his friendly doctor he would not be silent while he had any power to speak, often saying, 'O Sir, you take much thought for my body; give me leave to take thought for your soul.' When I could scarcely understand anything he said, I spoke the words, '*God is love!*' Instantly he caught them, and broke out in a rapture, 'God is *love, love, love!* O for the gust of praise I want to sound!' Here his voice again failed. If I named his sufferings, he would smile, and make the sign.

"On Friday, August 12, finding his body covered with spots, I so far understood them as to feel a sword pierce through my soul. As I knelt by his bed, with my hand in his, intreating the Lord to be with us in this tremendous hour, he strove to say many things, but could not. At length, pressing my hand, and often repeating the sign, he breathed out, 'Head of the Church, be head to my wife!' Sally said to him, 'My dear master, do you know *me?*' He replied, 'Sally, God will put His right hand under you.' She added, 'O my dear master, should you be taken away, what a disconsolate creature will my poor mistress be!' He answered, 'God will be her all in all.' He had always delighted in the lines—

"'Jesu's blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries.'

"When I repeated them to him, he cried, '*Boundless, boundless!*' and added, though with great difficulty—

"'Mercy's *full* power *I soon* shall prove,
Lov'd with an everlasting love.'

"On the afternoon of Saturday, August 13, while a few Christian friends were standing near his bed, he stretched out his hand to each of them, and, to a minister, remarked, 'Are you ready to assist to-morrow?' One asked, 'Do you think the Lord will raise you up?' He strove to answer, 'Raise in resur . . . raise in resur . . . .' To another, who put the same question, he replied, 'I leave it all to God.' I said, 'My dear creature, I ask not for myself, but for the sake of others. If Jesus is very present with thee, lift thy right hand.' He did so. I added, 'If the prospect of glory opens before thee, repeat the sign.' He raised his hand again; and, in half a minute, a second time. After this, his dear hands moved no more; but, on my asking, 'Art thou in much pain?' he answered, 'No.'

"From this time, he entered into a kind of sleep, though with his eyes open and fixed. Twenty-four hours, my dearly beloved breathed like a person in common sleep; and then, at thirty-five minutes past ten on Sunday night, August 14, his precious soul entered into the joy of his Lord, in the fifty-sixth year of his age. I was scarce a minute at a time from him, night or day, during his illness, and I can truly say—

"'No cloud did arise, to darken the skies,
Or hide for one moment his Lord from his eyes.'

"And here I break off my mournful story. On my bleeding heart, his fair picture of heavenly excellence will be for ever drawn. When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavours to seek and save the lost, his diligence in the employment of his time, his Christlike condescension towards me, and his uninterrupted converse with heaven, I may well be allowed to add, my loss is beyond the power of words to paint.

"On August 17, his dear remains were deposited in Madeley churchyard; amid the tears and lamentations of thousands, who flocked about the bier of their dead pastor. Between the house and the church, they sung these verses:—

"'With heavenly weapons he hath fought
The battles of the Lord:
Finish'd his course, and kept the faith,
And gain'd the great reward.

"'God hath laid up in heaven for him
A crown which cannot fade;
The righteous Judge, at that great day,
Shall place it on his head.'

"The service was performed by the Rev. Mr. Hatton, Rector of

Waters-Upton, whom the Lord moved, in a pathetic manner, to speak to the weeping flock. At my request, he read the following paper:—[1]

"'It was the desire of my beloved husband to be buried in this plain manner, and, out of tenderness, he begged that I might not be present. In all things I would obey him.

"'Permit me, by the mouth of a friend, to bear my testimony, to the glory of God, that I never knew anyone walk so closely with God as he did. The Lord gave him a conscience tender as the apple of an eye. He literally preferred the interest of every one to his own. He shared *his all* with the poor, who lay so close his heart, that, when his speech was so gone that he could utter nothing without difficulty, he cried out, "*O my Poor!* What will become of my Poor?" He was blessed with so great a degree of humility as is scarcely to be found. I am witness, how often he has taken real pleasure in being treated with contempt. It seemed the very food of his soul, to be little and unknown. When he said to me, "Thou wilt write a line or two to my brother in Switzerland, if I die," I replied, "My dear, dear love, I will write him all the Lord's dealings with thee." "No, no," said he, "write nothing about me. I only desire to be forgotten. *God is all.*"

"'His diligent visitation of the sick laid the foundation of the spotted fever of which he died; and his vehement desire to take his last leave of *you*, with dying lips and hands, gave (it is supposed) the finishing stroke, by preparing his blood for putrefaction. Thus did he live and die your servant.

"'He walked with death always in sight. About two months ago, he came to me and said, "My dear love, I know not how it is, but I have a strange impression death is very near us, as if it would be a sudden stroke upon one of us; and it draws out my soul in prayer that we may be ready." He then broke out, "Lord, prepare the soul Thou wilt call; and, O stand by the poor disconsolate one who shall be left behind!"

"'Three years, nine months, and two days, I have possessed my *heavenly-minded husband;* but now the sun of my earthly joy is *set for ever.*'"

This is a very artless story; but it is not less valuable because of that. Mrs. Fletcher sent a copy to Charles Wesley, together with the following note:—

"MADELEY, *August* 24, 1785.

"DEAR SIR,—Enclosed you have an account of my feelings when I thought myself dying, as did most about me. I prayed for strength to do justice to my dearest, dearest love. I wrote it in one day, but could not go over it a second time. Take it, then, as it flowed from my full heart, without a second thought, and pray for your deeply distressed friend. I cannot find your brother. I wrote to him at first, but have got no answer."[1]

---

[1] Mr. Hatton also preached a funeral sermon, founded on Hebrews xiii. 7.

Wesley, in his eighty-third year, was in the west of England, travelling and preaching with surprising energy. On the day of Fletcher's death, he preached twice at Salisbury; then hastened to Shaftesbury, Castle-Carey, Shepton-Mallet, Taunton, Collumpton, Exeter, and Plymouth; then went right through Cornwall; and, on September 3, got to Bristol, in the neighbourhood of which city he spent a month. On October 3, he came to London; then made what he calls "a little excursion" into Hertfordshire, another into Oxfordshire, and a third into Norfolk. Here, at Norwich, on October 24, he found time to write a sermon on the death of Fletcher, which he delivered in London on November 6. The sermon was published immediately, with the following address "To the reader" prefixed[2]:—

"A consciousness of my own inability to describe, in a manner worthy of the subject, such a person as Mr. Fletcher, was one great reason of my not writing this sooner. I judged, only an *Apelles* was proper to paint an *Alexander*. But I, at length, submitted to importunity, and hastily put together some memorials of this great man: intending, if God permit, when I have more leisure and more materials, to write a fuller account of his life.

"JOHN WESLEY.

"London, *November* 9, 1785."

The concluding paragraph of Wesley's sermon must be quoted:—

"For many years, I despaired of finding any inhabitant of Great Britain that could stand in any degree of comparison with Gregory Lopez, or Monsieur de Renty. But let any impartial person judge, if Mr. Fletcher was at all inferior to them? Did he not experience as deep communion with God, and as high a measure of inward holiness, as was experienced either by one or the other of those burning and shining lights? And it is certain his outward holiness shone before men, with full as bright a lustre as theirs. But if any should attempt to draw a parallel between them, there are two circumstances that deserve consideration. One is, we are not assured that the writers of *their* Lives did not extenuate, if not suppress, what was amiss in them. And some things amiss we are assured there were, namely, many touches of superstition, and some of idolatry, in worshipping Saints, the Virgin Mary in particular. But I have not suppressed or extenuated anything in Mr. Fletcher's character. For indeed I knew nothing that was amiss, nothing that needed to be extenuated, much less suppressed. A second circumstance is, that the Writers of *their* Lives could not have so full a knowledge of them, as both Mrs. Fletcher and I had of Mr. Fletcher, being both eye and ear-witnesses of his whole conduct. Consequently, we know that his life was not sullied with any mixture of either idolatry or superstition. I was intimately acquainted with him for above thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And, in all that time, I never heard him speak one improper word, nor saw him do an improper action.—To conclude. Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourscore years. But one equal to him I have not known: one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. So unblameable a character in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America. And I scarce expect to find another such, on this side eternity."

---

[1] Jackson's "Life of C. Wesley," vol. ii., p. 432.

[2] The title was, "A Sermon preached on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire. By John Wesley, A.M." 12mo. 32 pp.

Human praise could not be higher than this; and yet even the *Monthly Review*, which had so often and so unjustly denounced the Methodists, in its notice of Wesley's sermon, remarked:—

"Mr. Fletcher was one of the most considerable among the Methodist ministers of the Wesleyan division. We have long been acquainted with his good character; and we firmly believe that the high encomiums here passed on him were justly merited in their fullest extent."[1]

Scores of other eulogies have been written, but only four shall be added here, and these by persons who were well acquainted with the man of whom they speak.

The Rev. Joshua Gilpin's elaborate biographical "Notes," interspersed in Fletcher's "Portrait of St. Paul," are too numerous and lengthened to be introduced, but an extract from the last of them (the twenty-ninth) must be given:—

"On the day of Mr. Fletcher's departure, as I was preparing to attend my own church, which was at the distance of nine miles from Madeley, I received a message from Mrs. Fletcher, requesting my immediate attendance at the vicarage. I instantly followed the messenger, and found Mr. Fletcher with every symptom of approaching dissolution upon him. I had ever looked up to this man of God with an extraordinary degree of affection and reverence; and, on this afflicting occasion, my heart was uncommonly affected and depressed. It was now in vain to recollect that public duty required my presence in another place. Unfitted for every duty, except that of silently watching the bed of death, I found it impossible to withdraw from the solemn scene. I had received from this evangelical teacher, in days that were past, many excellent precepts with respect to *holy living;* and now I desired to receive from him the last important lesson with respect to *holy dying*. And truly this concluding lesson was of inestimable worth, since so much patience and resignation, so much peace and composure, were scarcely ever discovered in the same circumstances before.

---

[1] *Monthly Review*, 1786, p. 79.

"While their pastor was breathing out his soul into the hands of a faithful Creator, his people were offering up their joint supplications on his behalf in the house of God. Little, however, was seen among them but affliction and tears.[1] The whole village wore an air of consternation and sadness, and not one joyful song was heard among its inhabitants. Hasty messengers were passing to and fro with anxious enquiries and confused reports; and the members of every family sat together in silence that day, awaiting, with trembling expectation, the issue of every hour. After the conclusion of the evening service, several of the poor, who came from distant parts, and who were usually entertained under Mr. Fletcher's roof, still lingered about the house, and seemed unable to tear themselves away from the place without a sight of their expiring pastor. Secretly informed of their desire, I obtained them the permission they wished; and the door of the chamber being set open, immediately before which Mr. Fletcher was sitting upright in his bed, with the curtains undrawn, they slowly moved, one by one, along the gallery, severally pausing as they passed by the door, and casting in a look of mingled supplication and anguish. It was, indeed, an affecting sight.

"And now the hour speedily approached that was to put a solemn termination to our hopes and fears. His weakness very perceptibly increased, but his countenance continued unaltered to the last. Mrs.

---

[1] Another writer, who was present, relates that the congregation sang, or tried to sing, the affecting hymn which was composed and used at the time of Fletcher's dangerous illness in 1776 (see pp. 362 and 368). He further says, "I never was witness to a scene so impressive and pathetic. Every breast felt, every countenance expressed, one common sentiment. Tears, sobs, and suppressed groans showed how sincerely the people esteemed their venerable pastor. When the hymn was sung, there was a general burst of sorrow. Even those who had spurned his instructions, deprecated his death as a public loss, and expressed their grief with uncommon agitation." (*Methodist Magazine*, 1802, p. 572.)

Fletcher was kneeling by the side of her departing husband, the medical attendant sat at his head, while I sorrowfully waited near his feet. Uncertain whether or not he was totally separated from us, we pressed nearer; but his warfare was accomplished, and the happy spirit had taken its everlasting flight."

James Ireland, Esq., was one of Fletcher's most loving and well-beloved friends. In an unpublished letter, addressed to Mrs. Fletcher, and dated "Brislington, November 6, 1785," he says, Wesley had informed him he was about to write the "Life of Fletcher," and had asked him to supply materials. In his reply, he had said, "I cannot assist *you* to write the life of my dear friend, though I have ever respected and honoured you." Mr. Ireland adds, that whatever information he can furnish he will send to Mrs. Fletcher, and leave it to her to use as she thinks best. He then proceeds :—

"I have often felt that I would have divided my last shilling with Mr. Fletcher. We were once for months together, day and night; and when we parted, we both wept. Such a soul I never knew; such a great man, in every sense of the word. He was too great to bear the name of any sect. Mr. Townsend, with whom I lately parted, speaks of him as the greatest man that has lived in this century, and begs his life may not be penned in haste."

In another unpublished letter, also addressed to Mrs. Fletcher, and dated "October 6, 1786," Mr. Ireland wrote:—

"I never saw Mr. Fletcher's equal. On him great grace was bestowed. What deadness to the world! What spiritual mindedness! What zeal for souls! What communion with God! What intercourse with heaven! What humility at the feet of Jesus! What moderation towards all men! What love for the poor! In short, he possessed the mind which was in Christ Jesus."

The Rev. Henry Venn, after reading Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," wrote as follows to Lady Mary Fitzgerald :—

"Yelling, March 3, 1787. Mr. Fletcher's *humility* was so unfeigned and so deep, that when I thanked him for two sermons he had one day preached to my people at Huddersfield, he answered as no man ever did to me. With eyes and hands uplifted, he exclaimed, 'Pardon, pardon, pardon, O my God!' The words went to my very soul. Great grace was upon this blessed servant of Christ.

"*Love to man* and bowels of mercies displayed in him a noble imitation of his Incarnate God. He indeed thought a day lost, and could find no rest in his soul, unless he was doing good to the bodies and souls of men.

"*Love to the Lord.*—How did it govern and flourish in dear Mr. Fletcher! His admirable consort tells us, he scarcely was awake in the night a moment without lifting up his soul to God in holy aspirations.

"I have seen Mr. Fletcher, for six weeks together, under a hectic fever, sometimes spitting blood, when night after night he could rest very little—*well pleased to suffer*—never complaining, never but cheerful. Once, when I asked him how he did, 'Oh!' said he, 'how light is the chastisement I suffer! How heavy the strokes I deserve! I love the rod of my heavenly Father!' Like his Saviour, he could continue in prayer, in the wood, all night long; and, like Him, lie prostrate on the ground, pleading for grace to fulfil his ministry."[1]

Between Fletcher and Joseph Benson there was a most intimate and confidential friendship. Benson, in a letter to Wesley, wrote:—

"As to *drawing* the character of that great and good man, Mr. Fletcher, it is what I will not attempt. I have been looking over many of his letters, and observe in them all, what I have a thousand times observed in his conversation and behaviour, the plainest marks of every Christian grace and virtue.

"Perhaps, if he followed his Master more closely in one thing than another, it was in *humility.* He was constantly upon his guard lest any expression should drop, either from his lips or pen, which tended to make anyone think well of him; either on account of his family, or learning, or parts, or usefulness. He took as much pains to *conceal his* excellences, as others do to *show theirs.*

"He was a man of a *serious spirit,* one that stood at the utmost distance from levity of every kind. Though he was constantly cheerful, as rejoicing in hope of his heavenly inheritance, yet he had too deep a sense of his own wants, and the wants of the Church of God, as also of the sins and miseries of mankind, to be at any time light or trifling.

"In *hungering and thirsting after righteousness,* he was peculiarly worthy of our imitation. He never rested in anything he had either experienced or done in spiritual matters. He was a true Christian racer, always on the stretch for higher and better things. Though his attainments, both in experience and usefulness, were far above the common standard, yet the language of his conversation and behaviour always was, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected; but I follow after, if by any means I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.' He had his eye upon a full conformity to the Son of God; or what the Apostle terms, 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' Nor could he be satisfied with anything less.

---

[1] "Life of Rev. H. Venn," pp. 578-584.

"He was *meek*, like his Master, as well as *lowly in heart*. Not that he was so by nature, but of a fiery, passionate spirit; insomuch that he has frequently thrown himself on the floor, and lain there most of the night bathed in tears, imploring victory over his own temper. And he did obtain the victory, in a very eminent degree. For twenty years and upwards before his death, no one ever saw him out of temper, or heard him utter a rash expression, on any provocation whatever.[1] And he did not want provocation, and that sometimes in a high degree; especially from those whose religious sentiments he thought it his duty to oppose. But none of these things moved him: no, not in the least degree. The keenest word he used was, 'What a world, what a religious world we live in!' I have often thought the testimony, that Bishop Burnet bears of Archbishop Leighton, might be borne of him with equal propriety: 'After an intimate acquaintance of many years, and after being with him by night and by day, at home and abroad, in public and in private, on sundry occasions and in various affairs,—I must say, I never heard an idle word drop from his lips, nor any conversation which was not to the use of edifying. I never saw him in any temper, in which I myself would not have wished to be found at death.' Any one, who has been intimately acquainted with Mr. Fletcher, will say the same of him: and they who knew him best will say it with the most assurance.

"Hence arose his readiness to bear with the weaknesses, and forgive the faults of others: which was the more remarkable, considering his flaming zeal against sin, and his concern for the glory of God. Such hatred to sin, and such love to the sinner, I never saw joined together before.

"He never mentioned the faults of an absent person, unless absolute duty required it. And then he spoke with the utmost tenderness, extenuating, rather than aggravating. None could draw his picture more exactly than St. Paul has done, in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. 'He suffered long and was kind; he envied not; acted not rashly; was not puffed up; did not behave himself unseemly; sought not his own; was not easily provoked; he thought no evil; rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth; he covered all things; believed all things; hoped all things; and endured all things.' It would be easy to enlarge on all these particulars, and show how they were exemplified in him; but, waiving this, I would only observe, that, with regard to two of them, *kindness* to others, and *not seeking his own*, he had few equals.

"His *kindness* to others was such, that he bestowed his all upon them: his time, his talents, his substance. His knowledge, his eloquence, his health, his money, were employed, day by day, for the good of mankind. He prayed, he wrote, he preached, he visited the sick and well, he conversed, he gave, he laboured, he suffered, winter and summer, night and day: he endangered, nay, destroyed his health, and in the end gave his life also for the profit of his neighbours, that they might be saved from everlasting death. He denied himself even of such food as was necessary for him, that he might have to give to them that had none. And when he was constrained to change his manner of living, still his diet was plain and simple. And so were his clothing and furniture, that he might save all that was possible for his poor neighbours.

---

[1] Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," p. 173.

"He *sought not his own* in any sense: not his own honour, but the honour of God, in all he said or did. He sought not his own interest, but the interest of his Lord, spreading knowledge, holiness, and happiness, as far as he possibly could. He sought not his own pleasure, but studied to 'please all men, for their good to edification;' and to please Him that had called him to His kingdom and glory.

"But I do not attempt his full character. I will only add, '*He was blameless and harmless, a son of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation: shining among them as a light in the world.*'"

Both Wesley and Benson insert this eulogium in their lives of Fletcher; but Wesley adds:—

"I think one talent wherewith God had endued Mr. Fletcher has not been sufficiently noted yet. I mean his *courtesy;* in which there was not the least touch either of art or affectation. It was pure and genuine, and sweetly constrained him to behave to everyone (although particularly to inferiors), in a manner not to be described: with so inexpressible a mixture of humility, love, and respect. This directed his words, the tone of his voice, his looks, his whole attitude, his every motion.

"'Grace was in all his steps, heaven in his eye,
In all his gestures sanctity and love.'"

The entry of Fletcher's death, in the register of Madeley parish church, is a brief obituary:—

"Memorandum.

"John Fletcher, Clerk, died on Sunday evening, August 14, 1785. He was one of the most apostolic men of the age in which he lived. His abilities were extraordinary, and his labours were unparalleled. He was a burning and shining light; and as his life had been a common blessing to the inhabitants of this parish, so the death of this great man was lamented by them as a common and irreparable loss.

"This little testimony was inserted by one who sincerely loved and honoured him.

"JOSHUA GILPIN, VICAR OF ROCKWARDINE."

The inscription on his tombstone was written by his widow, and is as follows[1] :—

"HERE LIES THE BODY OF
THE REV. JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE,
VICAR OF MADELEY,
WHO WAS BORN AT NYON, IN SWITZERLAND,
SEPTEMBER THE 12TH, 1729,
AND FINISHED HIS COURSE, AUGUST THE 14TH, 1785,
IN THIS VILLAGE;
WHERE HIS UNEXAMPLED LABOURS
WILL LONG BE REMEMBERED.

HE EXERCISED HIS MINISTRY FOR THE SPACE OF
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS,
IN THIS PARISH,
WITH UNCOMMON ZEAL AND ABILITY.

MANY BELIEVED HIS REPORT, AND BECAME
HIS JOY AND CROWN OF REJOICING;
WHILE OTHERS CONSTRAINED HIM TO TAKE UP
THE LAMENTATION OF THE PROPHET,

'ALL THE DAY LONG HAVE I STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS
UNTO A DISOBEDIENT AND GAINSAYING PEOPLE:
YET SURELY MY JUDGMENT IS WITH THE LORD,
AND MY WORK WITH MY GOD.'

"'*He being dead, yet speaketh.*'"

Another monument of Fletcher must be mentioned, erected in Methodism's "Westminster Abbey"—the sacred old chapel in City Road, London. It is placed on the right-hand side of the communion table, immediately under a monument of Wesley. The sculpture at the top of it is a representation of the Ark of the Covenant. At one side are volumes, inscribed with the words, "Checks," and "Portrait of St. Paul." At the other side is an expanded scroll, with the motto, "With the meekness of wisdom." At the bottom is a dove, hovering over pens and a roll of paper. The inscription on the tablet, composed by the Rev. Richard Watson,[1] is as follows:—

---

[1] The inscription, given at the end of Wesley's "Life of Fletcher," is slightly different. In an unpublished letter, to Mrs. Crosby, dated August 16, 1788, Mrs. Fletcher wrote: "What was written on my dear's tomb was different from my directions, though done with a good design to mend my language. I saw it not to be as good as my own, and had it altered" (then follows the inscription). "Compare this with that in Mr. Wesley's 'Life,' and give Mr. Downes a copy of the right one. Every one was much pleased with the change; and, indeed, I was never at ease till it was done; but there were so many anxious to have it right that they spoiled it."

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
THE REV. JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE,
VICAR OF MADELEY IN SHROPSHIRE;
BORN AT NYON, IN SWITZERLAND, THE XII. OF SEPTEMBER,
A.D. MDCCXXIX; DIED THE XIV. OF AUGUST, MDCCLXXXV.

A MAN EMINENT FOR GENIUS, ELOQUENCE, AND THEOLOGICAL LEARNING;
STILL MORE DISTINGUISHED FOR SANCTITY OF MANNERS, AND THE VIRTUES OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.
ADORNED WITH 'WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY,'
AND BRINGING FORTH 'THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT,' IN SINGULAR RICHNESS AND MATURITY.
THE MEASURE OF EVERY OTHER GRACE IN HIM WAS EXCEEDED BY HIS DEEP AND UNAFFECTED HUMILITY.
OF ENLARGED VIEWS AS TO THE MERIT OF THE ATONEMENT,
AND OF THOSE GRACIOUS RIGHTS WITH WHICH IT INVESTS ALL WHO BELIEVE,
HE HAD 'BOLDNESS TO ENTER INTO THE HOLIEST BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS,'
AND IN REVERENT AND TRANSPORTING CONTEMPLATIONS,—THE HABIT OF HIS DEVOUT AND HALLOWED SPIRIT,—
THERE DWELT AS BENEATH THE WINGS OF THE CHERUBIM,
BEHOLDING 'THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST,' AND WAS 'CHANGED INTO THE SAME IMAGE;'
TEACHING BY HIS OWN ATTAINMENTS, MORE THAN EVEN BY HIS WRITINGS, THE FULNESS OF EVANGELICAL PROMISES,
AND WITH WHAT INTIMACY OF COMMUNION MAN MAY WALK WITH GOD.

HE WAS THE FRIEND AND COADJUTOR OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY,
WHOSE APOSTOLIC VIEWS OF THE DOCTRINES OF GENERAL REDEMPTION, JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, HE SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED,
LEAVING TO FUTURE AGES AN ABLE EXPOSITION OF 'THE TRUTH WHICH IS ACCORDING TO GODLINESS,'
AND ERECTING AN IMPREGNABLE RAMPART AGAINST PHARISAIC AND ANTINOMIAN ERROR,
IN A SERIES OF WORKS, DISTINGUISHED BY THE BEAUTY OF THEIR STYLE, BY FORCE OF ARGUMENT,
AND BY A GENTLE AND CATHOLIC SPIRIT; AFFORDING AN EDIFYING EXAMPLE OF 'SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE,'
IN A LONG AND ARDENT CONTROVERSY.

FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, THE PARISH OF MADELEY WAS THE SCENE OF HIS UNEXAMPLED PASTORAL LABOURS;
AND HE WAS THERE INTERRED, AMIDST THE TEARS AND LAMENTATIONS OF THOUSANDS,
THE TESTIMONY OF THEIR HEARTS TO HIS EXALTED PIETY, AND TO HIS UNWEARIED EXERTIONS FOR THEIR SALVATION:
BUT HIS MEMORY TRIUMPHED OVER DEATH;
AND HIS SAINTLY EXAMPLE EXERTS INCREASING INFLUENCE IN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST,
THROUGH THE STUDY OF HIS WRITINGS, AND THE PUBLICATION OF HIS BIOGRAPHY.

IN TOKEN OF THEIR VENERATION FOR HIS CHARACTER,
AND IN GRATITUDE FOR THE SERVICES RENDERED BY HIM TO THE CAUSE OF TRUTH,
THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY THE TRUSTEES OF THIS CHAPEL, A.D. MDCCCXXII."

---

[1] Jackson's "Centenary of Methodism," p. 186.

No wonder that Wesley desired and requested Fletcher to be his successor; and no wonder that, while among his numerous publications there is only *one biography written by himself*, that conspicuous exception is "A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Rev. John Fletcher."

Fletcher was distinguished for his genius; his learning; and his biblical and theological knowledge; but let all Methodists, throughout the world and as long as Methodism lasts, remember, in all their church-meetings and church-appointments, that "Wesley's Designated Successor" was *pre-eminently*,—"A GOOD MAN, AND FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST AND OF FAITH."

THE END

Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

INDEX.

NAMES OF PERSONS AND PLACES.

Aberford, 119
Abergavenny, 184
Agutter, Rev. William, 144, 145
Appian Way, 162
Appleton, Mr., 22
Asbury, Francis, 3
Ashworth, Dr., 532
Atcham, 21, 22, 29, 31
Atlay, John, 340, 433, 545, 546
Atmore, Charles, 542, 545

Baratier, M., 145
Bardsley, Samuel, 548
Barnard, Mary, 74
Barry, James, 424
Bath, 102, 121, 172, 393, 420
Batley, 494, 496, 497
Bayley, Rev. Cornelius, 461, 462, 508, 542
Beaumont, John, 543
Beaumont, Dr. Joseph, 543
Bell, George, 84, 85, 90
Benson, Joseph, 3, 39, 157, 159, 166, 167, 175—177, 179, 182, 183, 209, 216, 220, 254, 255, 310, 326, 348, 355—358, 367, 370, 395, 462, 532, 533, 543, 546, 570—572
Bentley, Rev. Mr., 119
Berkeley, Dr., 534
Berridge, Rev. John, 51—53, 62, 172, 283—285, 294, 298, 307, 330, 334, 345, 371, 387
Berwick, 111, 154
Birches, The, 274
Birstal, 487, 517
Bouverot, Rev. Mr., 531
Boothby, William, 442
Bosanquet, Miss, 15, 28, 93, 126, 400, 401, 410, 448, 463, 467, 479—497, 499, 529
Bosanquet, Claudius, Esq., 488, 492
Bosanquet, S., Esq., 479, 488, 490—492
Bosanquet, S. R., Esq., 475
Bosanquet, William, Esq., 492, 494, 556
Bourignon, Madam, 463
Bradburn, Samuel, 266—268, 494
Bradford, 493, 494, 501
Bradford, Joseph, 327
Brammah, Mrs., 471
Brecknock, 181
Breedon, 100, 152
Brighton, 51, 111, 120
Brisco, Thomas, 487
Bristol, 31, 33, 34, 102, 131, 144, 158, 172, 180, 238, 242, 255, 330, 357, 388, 394—397, 519
Bristol, Earl of, 401
Brooke, Robert, 506, 507
Brooke, Henry, 506, 507, 520, 521, 538, 552
Broseley, 363, 405, 430
Brown, Rev. Mr., 103, 107, 118, 331
Buchan, Earl of, 123, 275
Burchell, Mr., 10
Barnet, Rev. Mr., 119
Burslem, 548

Cartwright, Rev. Mr., 21
Cartwright, Molly, 442, 445, 446
Chambers, Rev. Mr., 47, 55
Chateau d'Oex. 426, 427
Cheek, Rev. Moseley, 515
Cheshunt College, 137
Chester, 267, 415, 429
Childs, Elizabeth, 272
Clarke, Dr. Adam, 268, 396, 548
Clarke, Mary, 33
Coalbrook Dale, 63, 64, 99, 363, 392, 430, 445, 527

Coke, Rev. Dr., 331—333, 433, 463, 466, 518, 530, 531, 542, 544
Coles, Elisha, 155
Conyers, Rev. Dr., 119, 417
Costerdine, Robert, 429
Cound, Mrs., 405, 430
Cownley, Joseph, 90, 358
Creighton, Rev. James, 544
Crisp, Rev. Dr., 194, 202, 214
Crosby, Sarah, 28, 33, 400, 467, 473, 475, 479, 480, 495, 573
Crosse, Rev. John, 461, 493
Cross Hall, 467, 486, 489, 494, 495, 502
Crowther, Jonathan, 82, 523

Dartmouth, Earl of, 353
Daventry, 532
Davies, Rev. Howell, 149—151
Dawley, 429, 503
De Bons, Mr., 489
De Champs, Mr., 11, 488
De Courcy, Rev. Mr., 472
Deighton, Rev. John, 497
De Luc, Mr., 511
Deptford, 418
Dewsbury, 433
Dickenson, Rev. Peard, 554
Dillon, Rev. Mr., 543
Dixon, Dr. James, 396
Dort, Synod of, 155
Downs, Mr., 44
Downes, John, 90
Downs, John, 44
Dublin, 221, 506, 508, 517—522, 530
Dunham, 54

Easterbrook, Rev. Joseph, 131—134, 144
Eddowes, Mr., 288
Edmondson, Jonathan, 152
Edmunds, Daniel, 403
Edmunds, Winifred, 558
Edwards, Richard, 14, 23, 31
Eells, William, 545, 546
Elliott, Sir John, 388
Elwall, Edward, 218, 219
Erskine, Lady Anne, 117, 120, 137, 149, 171, 174
Evans, Caleb, 334, 347—353, 357, 358
Everton, 51, 371

Fennel, John, 550
Ferrars, Earl of, 50
Fitzgerald, Lady Mary, 401, 473, 474, 501, 509, 540, 552, 558, 569
Fletcher, Henry, 11, 14, 18, 498, 559
Fletcher, Mrs., 502—504, 508, 512, 517—519, 521, 522, 539, 550, 553, 556, 558—565, 568, 569, 573
Fothergill, Dr., 390
Fox, Mr., 370
Furley, Miss, 44, 46

Garforth, Thomas, 498
Geneva, 7, 445, 454
Genoa, 160
Gilbert, Nathaniel, Esq., 36, 513
Gilbert, Rev. Nathaniel, 513, 514
Gildersome, 480
Gilpin, Rev. Joshua, 81, 160, 445, 455, 512, 515, 520, 567, 572
Glascott, Rev. Cradock, 120, 121, 135, 136, 154, 189
Glazebrook, Rev. James, 122, 124
Glenorchy, Lady, 174, 175
Glossop, 389
Glynne, Mrs., 22, 518
Gold, Mrs., 476
Good, Mr., 370
Gorham, Mr., 371, 372, 466
Greaves, Rev. Alexander B., 365, 366, 368, 384, 388, 389, 404, 414, 423, 431, 436, 438, 440, 445, 460, 461
Green, Rev. Mr., 14
Greenwood, Charles, 372, 373, 382, 390, 392, 409, 432, 433, 460, 516, 541
Greenwood, James, 372
Grimshaw, Rev. William, 97, 119, 384

Halifax, 494
Hampson, John, senior, 545, 546
Hampson, John, junior, 545, 546
Hanby, Thomas, 3, 542
Hare, Mr., 370
Harris, Howell, 148—151, 171, 182—184
Harwich, 141
Hatfield, 10
Hatherleigh, 121
Hatton, Miss, 90, 91, 95, 106—108, 111, 115
Hatton, Rev. Mr., 80, 513, 564, 565
Hatton, Samuel, 90, 91, 188, 429
Haughton, Mr., 78
Haworth, 119
Hay, 182
Helmsley, 418
Henderson, John, 144—148
Henderson, Richard, 145—147, 149
Hereford, Bishop of, 58, 389
Hern, Jonathan, 442
Hervey, Rev. James, 345
Hicks, Rev. Mr., 52
Hill, Noel, Esq., 489
Hill, Sir Richard, 40, 111, 120, 154, 189, 215, 219, 223—237, 241, 244, 248—252, 279—282, 285—295, 299, 303, 307, 311—313, 316—320, 322, 330, 334, 335
Hill, Rev. Rowland, 178, 186, 237, 241, 244, 245, 248, 287, 330, 334, 385, 387, 472
Hill, Thomas, Esq., 11, 14, 22, 25, 29, 32, 35, 37, 41, 47, 54, 55, 58, 64, 488, 489

Hodson, John, 98
Holy, Thomas, 471
Hopper, Christopher, 3
Horne, Rev. Melville, 88, 126, 513—516, 555
Hotham, Sir Charles, 111
Hotham, Lady Gertrude, 49
Hoxton Square, 476
Huddersfield, 119, 121
Hull, 370
Hurrel, Miss, 400
Huntingdon, Countess of, 31, 32, 37, 44, 48—52, 56, 57, 59, 62, 64, 102, 111, 116—122, 125, 131, 134, 136, 137, 143, 149, 151, 155, 157, 164, 171, 172, 174, 175, 178—190, 192, 197, 209, 264, 299—302, 305, 310, 345, 357, 387, 393, 501

Ingham, Rev. Benjamin, 119
Ireland, James, Esq., 103, 104, 109, 115, 118, 120, 121, 137, 138, 140, 155, 156, 158, 160—162, 171, 189, 191, 192, 194, 197, 269, 299, 301, 348, 355, 365, 366, 378, 387, 388, 392, 393, 399, 407, 409, 410, 416—421, 424, 427, 436, 440, 444, 445, 447, 450, 460, 472, 549, 557, 569
Ireland, Miss, 107, 108, 138, 139

Jackson, Daniel, 519
Jackson, Thomas, 332
Janes, Thomas, 242, 243
Jobson, Dr., 505
Johnson, Ann, 474
Johnson, Dr., 146, 347
Jones, Rev. John, 141—144
Jones, Sir William, 146

Keen, Mr., 117, 137
Kinaston, Mr., 489
Kingswood, 31, 64, 131, 144, 147, 152, 157, 462
Kippax, 118—120
Knipe, Mrs., 418
Knowles, Dr., 420
Kruse, Mrs., 39
Kruse, Peter, 39

Lausanne, 435, 439, 440, 443, 447, 489
Lawrence, Sarah, 477, 518, 563
Ledsham, 153
Lee, Mr., 111
Lee, Thomas, 545
Leeds, 121, 465—470, 477, 481, 532, 541, 545—549
Lefevre, Mrs., 475
Lentzburg, 7
Lewen, Miss, 478, 479
Ley, Rev. William, 85
Leytonstone, 475, 476, 479, 489, 491
Liverpool, Lord, 401
Llanbister, 395
Llangollen, 518
Lloyd, Rev. David, 395
Lloyd, John, 171, 188
London, 11, 36—39, 41, 47, 49, 50, 84, 111, 114, 180, 242, 447, 573
Lowestoft, 369
Loxdale, Miss Ann, 462—464, 468
Ludlow, 78
Lyons, 447

Macon, 416, 417, 419
Madan, Rev. Martin, 52, 79, 119, 134, 215, 246, 324, 361
Madeley, 47, 55, 57—62, 76, 89, 93, 158, 191, 255, 258, 369, 373, 382, 389, 405, 415, 423, 429, 430, 450, 460, 489, 492, 502, 505, 526, 527, 530, 539, 551
Madeley Wood, 63, 64, 74, 76, 79, 83, 118, 255, 388, 403, 429, 430, 438, 526, 527, 547
Maidenhead, 152
Manchester, 461
Marseilles, 160, 416, 448
Mather, Alexander, 3, 99, 209
Matthews, Mary, 74, 76, 77
Maxfield, Rev. Thomas, 33, 39, 84, 85, 90, 91, 144, 180, 181
Maxwell, Lady, 220
Medhurst, Mrs., 119, 120
Minethorpe, William, 99
Montpelier, 155, 410, 414, 416, 447, 461
Moore, Henry, 412, 519, 542, 543
More, Miss Hannah, 146
Morris, James, 347
Murlin, John, 415, 477, 479

Nelson, John, 3, 517
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 356
Newton, Rev. John, 283
North, Lord, 437, 438
Norwich, 369
Nowell, Rev. Dr., 154, 206, 232
Nyon, 4, 7, 9, 156, 162, 415, 421, 424—427, 431, 434—436, 439, 443—446, 453, 455, 464, 488, 498

Oathall, 111, 112, 117
Olivers, Thomas, 3, 190, 208, 209, 232, 290, 335, 337, 339
Onions, Michael, 363, 385, 392, 432, 445, 446
Orton, Miss, 117, 171
Otley, 541
Owen, Rev. Mr., 189
Owen, John, 445, 446

Palmer, Robert, 388
Pawson, John, 3, 153, 242
Peckwell, Rev. Dr., 385, 387
Perronet, Charles, 252, 364, 365, 390

Perronet, Miss Damaris, 385, 389, 390, 407, 473
Perronet, Edward, 285
Perronet, Henry, 97
Perronet, Rev. Vincent, 364, 365, 385, 390, 407, 419, 430, 432, 447, 499, 500, 554, 556
Perronet, William, 389, 399, 415, 419, 425—428, 431—435, 439, 440, 444, 447, 499, 500
Pescod, Joseph, 466
Pewsey, 119
Pilmoor, Joseph, 3, 543, 545, 546
Pine, William, 191, 192, 349
Pool, John, 545
Power, Mr., 420
Powley, Rev. Mr., 119
Powys, Thomas, Esq., 111, 115, 189, 215
Preston, Mr., 370
Price, Dr., 219, 334, 350—353, 357, 358, 387
Price, Owen, 38
Priestley, Dr., 531—537
Pritchard, John, 545
Prothero, Rev. Mr., 65

Ramsden, Mr., 370
Rankin, Thomas, 3, 447, 464
Reader, Thomas, 320
Reading, 407
Richardson, Rev. Mr., 119
Ritchie, Miss, 400, 541
Roberts, John, 274
Rock Church, 76, 79
Rogers, Hester Ann, 467—471, 473, 485
Rogers, James, 397, 467
Romaine, Rev. William, 111, 122, 154, 174, 345, 472
Rome, 410
Roquet, Rev. James, 242, 243, 355, 366
Rowlands, Rev. Daniel, 148, 149, 151, 171, 172
Rutherford, Thomas, 3, 519
Ryan, Sarah, 28, 33, 35, 43, 46, 475—477, 480
Ryland, Rev. Mr., 119

Scott, Captain, 116—118, 120
Sellon, Rev. Walter, 101, 151, 187, 206—208, 219, 232, 252, 292
Serle, Ambrose, 294
Shadford, George, 3
Sheffield, 467, 471
Sherlock, Bishop, 32, 534
Shirley, Lady Frances, 49
Shirley, Rev. Walter, 50, 149—151, 171, 172, 174, 177, 179, 183, 185, 188—197, 201—204, 207, 209—215, 220—223, 229, 238, 239, 334, 345, 378, 385, 387
Shoreham, 385, 407
Shrewsbury, 22, 29, 31, 34, 97, 120, 136, 191, 288, 430, 518
Simeon, Rev. Charles, 551, 552
Simpson, Mr., 370
Simpson, Rev. David, 168, 543
Smisby, 152
Smith, William, 467, 497
Smyth, Mrs., 518, 519, 539
Smyth, William, 518, 520, 522
South Mimms, 10
Southey, Robert, 329
St. Albans, 14
St. Neots, 371, 372, 466
Stevenson, G. J., 209, 549
Stillingfleet, Rev. Edward, 133, 394
Stoke Newington, 372, 373, 382, 391, 403, 408, 409, 484, 552
Story, George, 3
Swedenborg, Baron, 531

Taunton, 320, 357
Tavan, Mr., 489
Taylor, Isaac, 329
Taylor Richard, 479—482, 498
Taylor, Thomas, 3, 395, 542
Terry, Mr., 370
Thompson, William, 3
Thornton, Mrs., 402, 433, 516, 552
Thornton, John, Esq., 283, 284, 378, 388, 418
Toplady, Rev. Augustus, 154, 203, 206, 208, 232, 284, 294, 312, 324, 334—347, 451.
Townsend, Rev. Joseph, 119, 132
Tranter, William, 503
Trevecca College, 116, 117, 121, 131, 134—137, 141, 144, 145, 148—151, 157, 158, 164, 171, 175—186, 209, 559
Tripp, Ann, 28, 477, 497
Tunbridge, 31, 32
Turner, Dr., 387

Valton, John, 496, 498, 516
Vaughan, Mr., 22, 29, 42, 268, 269, 353, 358
Venn, Rev. Henry, 52, 111, 119, 122, 133, 171, 172, 174, 371, 393, 394, 529, 569.
Voltaire, 416, 452, 457

Walsh, Father, 215
Walsh, Thomas, 28, 30, 37, 38
Wandsworth, 36
Wase, William, 384, 388, 405, 429, 438, 442, 444
Washington, General George, 347
Watson, Richard, 574
Wellington, 99
Wem, 90, 95, 107, 177
Wenlock, 79

Wesley, Rev. Charles, 31, 32, 35—38, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 55, 57, 62—64, 66, 76, 78—80, 84, 89—91, 96, 97, 129, 132, 141, 142, 152, 172, 180, 222, 285, 310, 327, 328, 346, 359—362, 367, 402, 433, 484, 511, 544, 556, 557, 565
Wesley, Rev. John, 1—3, 9, 16, 20, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 34, 36, 50, 57, 59, 67, 82, 84, 90, 91, 96, 122, 129, 132—134, 136, 141, 148, 150—154, 157, 169, 173—177, 180—209, 220, 222, 224, 225, 231, 232, 234—238, 241—243, 256, 263—266, 270, 280—282, 285—289, 298, 304, 307, 310, 321, 322, 324—329, 335, 336, 339—349, 351—358, 369, 370, 372, 373, 380, 384, 392, 394, 395, 402, 408, 410, 411, 430, 433, 451, 460, 463, 465, 477, 484, 485, 497, 502, 508, 532, 533, 541—549, 551, 558, 566, 570, 572, 575
West Bromwich, 366
Whatcoat, Richard, 3
Whitefield, Rev. George, 31, 67, 114—116, 119, 121, 134—136, 148, 173, 174, 180, 186, 187, 204, 265, 345
Whitehead, Dr. John, 264, 265
Wilberforce, William, Esq., 146
Wilcocks, Samuel, 274
Wilkes, John, 270—273
Wilkes, Sarah, 272
Williams, Rev. Peter, 149, 150, 171, 172
Williams, Rev. William, 148—150, 171, 172
Wood, Enoch, 548
Wroxeter, 29

Yates, Mr., 523
Yelling, 371
York, 120, 370
York, Thomas, 403, 405, 424, 434, 438, 441